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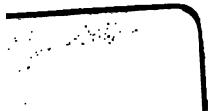
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BY MRS ALEXANDER
AUTHOR OF

THE WOOLING O'T



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HER DEAREST FOE.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. ALEXANDER,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOING O'T," AND "WHICH SHALL IT BE?"

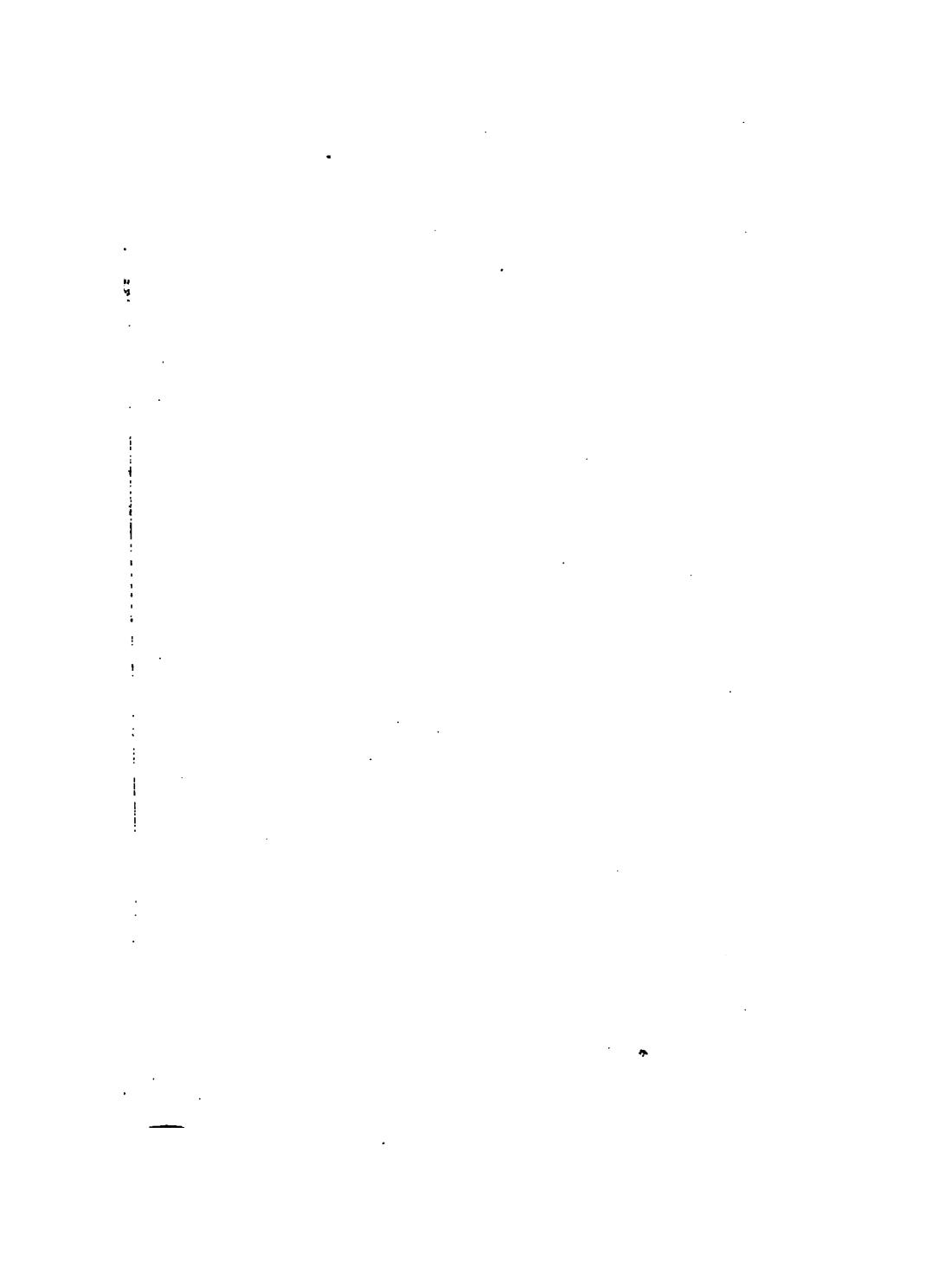
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HER DEAREST FOE.

CHAPTER I.

SIR HUGH GALBRAITH was the last of a long line of careless, improvident country gentlemen. His own father put the finishing stroke to the family fortunes, as a highly cultivated taste for racing, gambling, yachting, and all the linked charms that thereabouts do hang rapidly dispersed what remained to him.

As soon as Hugh had reached a legal age, after a boyhood of most heterogeneous and intermittent training, he gloomily yet willingly agreed to join his father in breaking the entail. Gloomily, because his was exactly the nature to cling closely to the family estate, and to part with the acres which had so long



supported the Galbraiths of Kirby-Grange was a bitter cross. Willingly, because the disgrace of unpaid debts was intolerable to his proud spirit.

So the late Baronet, freed from his most pressing difficulties, took himself and his three daughters to the Continent, where they passed, on the whole, a very bearable existence. Two of Sir Hugh's sisters picked up good matches—the prettiest, and the one he liked best, ran away with a German artist and died, at which her brother sternly rejoiced, as he considered such a marriage almost as disgraceful as if she had run away without any.

As a boy, Hugh Galbraith had been left much alone at the old country seat. His mother died while he was still a sturdy, passionate, bony urchin, in frocks—the terror of his nurses—the torment of his sisters. His father was generally away, his sisters at school, and his only education what small doses of learning the curate could induce him to imbibe. In other branches of a gentleman's acquirements he rapidly progressed. There was no horse in the stables or out of them he could not "back." He was a good shot, and a bold sailor, for the Grange was

close to a wild craggy coast, where many a fisher's family had to mourn the loss of the bread-winner and his boat in the stormy winter time. To the fishermen the young master was always welcome, and to them he could talk, not copiously, for his words were always few, but with a freedom that would have astonished his father and his polite, worldly elder sisters. These ornamental members of his family designated him "a sulky bear"—"a hopeless barbarian"—and not unjustly.

When he was about twelve, the curate left, and his father sent him to a second-rate school for "Young Gentlemen," where he was at first spoiled and petted as the sole representative of the master's aristocratic connection ; and then, when payments grew more and more irregular, and the dominie became enlightened as to the true state of affairs, the heir of Galbraith was considerably snubbed—a process of annealing not at all conducive to a healthy frame of mind.

It was about this time that Mr. Travers, who was first cousin to Sir Hugh's father, fell in with the lad. Being himself of a taciturn disposition, and having had a boyhood of hard knocks and puddings without plums,

he took a fancy to the young kinsman, whom no one else found attractive, put him to a good military school, bought him a commission in the Line, and made him a small allowance.

When Sir Frederick Galbraith died, and matters were arranged, a paltry pittance was all that remained of the revenues once forthcoming from his estates. Every acre, save a few that surrounded the old mansion, was sold ; and these, with the house, were let to a prosperous farmer, who wanted a little more land and a little better abode.

Small as was his inheritance, Sir Hugh declared it sufficient, renounced Mr. Travers' allowance, and exchanged into a dragoon regiment, with the prospect of going to India.

His relations with Mr. Travers continued to be most friendly. He was looked upon and considered himself to be, Mr. Travers' heir. In this light he shone in his married sister's drawing-rooms, when he condescended to go there, which was not often. To Mr. Travers he was heartily grateful, especially because he had not forced him to adopt trade, for which, said Mr. Travers, " I don't think you've brains enough." More, he liked and respected his benefactor better than any one else in the

world—except, perhaps, his chum, his school-fellow, his comrade, Willie Upton ! and for him probably liking considerably outweighed respect. Nevertheless, it seemed quite right and natural that Mr. Travers should have toiled all his life to amass a fortune for him (Hugh Galbraith) to buy back his estates with and live on them as became a gentleman of high degree. When, therefore, the elder cousin announced his marriage—briefly, and with an unconquerable degree of shamefacedness which communicated itself to the inanimate pen—Hugh Galbraith was furious. It seemed to him a scandalous breach of faith—a base withdrawal from an unspoken contract, which should have been all the more binding on a gentleman because it had been unexpressed ! And for whom was he thus defrauded ? Some rosy-cheeked plebeian ! some showy girl, that, in his own mind, he ranked with the barmaids and chambermaids who would not disdain addresses from the sergeants of his own troop ! If she had been a gentlewoman, ever so poor, the injury to himself would have been the same, but he would not have felt quite the same loathing and contempt that added fuel to the fire with which he read Mr. Travers' communication.

“‘The daughter of the lady with whom I have stayed for some years in the fishing season,’” he repeated scornfully to his friend Upton. “The woman who let him his lodgings, he means! How any man at any age can make such a —— ass of himself is beyond my comprehension; but a fellow like Travers!”

“Perhaps she was very pretty and taking,” returned his confidant, who had an amiable weakness for the sex.

But Sir Hugh was not to be pacified, as we have seen, and not only spake unadvisedly with his lips, but, what was much worse, wrote unadvisedly with his pen.

It was a cruel blow. Hugh Galbraith had never been disposed to indulge in bright dreams of the future, although he had more imagination than any one gave him credit for. The bitterness of poverty in high places had eaten into his heart, and closed it rigidly against the greater number of his fellow-creatures. He was strong to endure, and slow to speak—generally considered a cold, hard man, but too just, too real, not to have a certain amount of popularity with his brother officers. He was just to his equals, and would fain have been generous to his inferiors, as you would throw bones to a dog; not all the

severity of his training could expel the mighty self-will of the man. He would be kind to whoever obeyed and served him, but he burned to crush whoever crossed him. He was also capable of a good deal of self-control up to a certain point, and then "chaos came again!"

For women he had profound contempt, though it would have surprised him to be told so. They rather bored him, yet he would, if required, put himself to inconvenience for a woman, or expose himself to danger, and would think the man who could treat one badly a brute or a poltroon. A wife and legitimate children were unavoidable duties to be incurred for the sake of one's position, and to be held in all honour ; but as for finding companionship with women, or friendship, or a profitable exchange of ideas, such notions were never rejected by Galbraith, simply because they never suggested themselves. He had a dim consciousness that devotion and observance from a well-born, well-bred, very quiet woman would be pleasant, and a sort of thing he had a right to expect, by and by, when he was older ; but he was a little hard to please, for though he saw plenty of well-bred women, and handsome ones too, there was almost always a touch of affectation or un-

reality about them which his own uncompromising nature detected and despised.

All this applied to women of his own rank. Those of a humbler class were much more endurable than the men, and by no means to be badly treated. But then the treatment was measured by a totally different standard, and wounds inflicted on a lady for which blood only could atone, might for a woman of low degree be salved by golden ointment.

This is a tolerably correct sketch of Hugh Galbraith's ideas on matters and things in general, though it would have taken him a long time to extricate them with equal clearness from the tangle of contradictions, prejudices, and habits, the growth of years, round the primeval trunks of natural or instilled opinion.

The interview with his landlady had startled and astonished him. He could not get her out of his head, nor did he try ; he had been supremely bored before she appeared, and it was rather amusing to have a totally fresh subject to think about. He could still see her distinctly as she stood, when he looked up at her voice, the graceful, rounded outlines of her figure showing through a severely simple black dress, without trimming of any

description, and buttoned from throat to instep. No relief except a white muslin frill at neck and wrist ; her clear, pale, oval face, with its rich, red, curved lips, delicate, yet full ; the low, broad, white brow, and chestnut brown hair, braided carelessly, loosely back into a thick coil. Then her eyes ! they haunted him ; he could not tell if they were deepest blue or darkest brown, but the expression he would never forget ; the resolute, unflinching repellent gaze that met his own, nor the change created by the shadow of a smile that once flitted across their grave depths.

Her quiet manner of acceding to his request had in it something remarkable also. Not a shade of hesitation or embarrassment, no assumption of equality, no confession of inferiority, and yet no amount of dignity, of hauteur, of grace, could have produced so deep a conviction that she was emphatically a gentlewoman.

Her composed performance of the task he had given her enabled him to note well the haughty carriage of her head, the long, dark lashes that swept her cheek, the white, slender hand that held the pen so firmly and guided it so deftly, and the result of his reflections was summed up by a half-uttered

observation, "She is a gentlewoman, whatever has driven her behind the counter, that's clear enough! But why, in heaven's name, did she look at me as if I was the most hateful object in existence? Do I give too much trouble? Don't I pay rent enough? What is it? What a handsome creature! By Jove, Upton and Harcourt, and fellows like them, who are generally maundering about some woman or other, would say I had fallen on my legs, but," smiling grimly to himself, "that is not my line;" and so thinking, Sir Hugh, somewhat wearied with the slight excitement of the interview, fell asleep. It was true that he professed not to care for beauty, and said truly enough he never thought about it, but its absence vexed him unconsciously. Ugliness and want of grace were terrible sins in a woman—I ought to have written, gentlewoman. With the vagaries of men in love he had neither patience nor sympathy, considering them—

" Still beguiled
By passions, worthy of a fool or child."

He might have had his own indiscretions in early youth, but these do not concern the present story.

"Fanny," said Mrs. Temple, the morning after the interview just described, "did you write to Tom yesterday?"

"No; I wrote the day before. It is your turn."

"Well, when you do write, pray do not mention that I acted secretary to Sir Hugh Galbraith."

"No! Why?" asked Fanny with undisguised wonder.

"Oh! because it is not worth while; because I would prefer telling him about it, it would be more fun."

"Very well! only I counted on a description of that event to fill up my letter. Now, Kate, I suspect you think he would scold you for going to him!"

"Nonsense," returned Mrs. Temple, a shade haughtily. "Tom knows I am capable of managing my own affairs."

"Very well," repeated Fanny meekly; and the next instant exclaimed, "Here is that Mr. Turner!"

It was Turner junior; who said, as the shop was empty, he ventured to call with a message from his mother, requesting the pleasure of Mrs. Temple and Miss Lee's company on the following evening to supper. He

added, with a sigh, that they were quite strangers, as it seemed impossible to get a peep at them.

"I certainly do stick close to business," replied Mrs. Temple pleasantly. "And I have never gone out anywhere, except to Mrs. Owen's when her children were so ill, since I lost my husband; but that is no reason why I should shut up my young friend. I dare say she will be happy to accept Mrs. Turner's kind invitation."

Fanny, to use her own expression, made "big eyes" at her "worthy principal" during this speech, unseen by young Turner; but being always ready for a change, and by no means averse to amuse herself with the young man's ill-concealed admiration, she graciously accepted.

"And pray do not trouble to send for Miss Lee," added Mr. Joseph eagerly. "I dare say there is enough to do with an invalid in the house. I shall be happy to see her home."

"Nevertheless, I shall certainly send for Miss Lee," said Mrs. Temple gravely.

"I suppose you have had a troublesome time of it," continued their visitor, lingering; for of course Sir Hugh Galbraith's accident, Dr. Slade's fortunate presence in the field, the

conveyance of the injured man to the Berlin Bazaar—all this, with many variations and additions, had been buzzed about the little town with amazing rapidity ; such an event in the dead season was quite a godsend.

“ No, indeed,” returned Mrs. Temple. “ He scarcely gives any trouble. His own servant waits upon him, and both are very quiet.”

“ I am told he is a regular tip-topper,” remarked Mr. Joseph ; “ and that the Queen telegraphed to inquire for him.”

“ Perhaps so ; but the telegram did not come here,” said Mrs. Temple gravely, while Fanny burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. “ I am afraid the Queen is not aware of Sir Hugh Galbraith’s existence,” she cried. “ He is not quite such a personage.”

“ But Doctor Slade told father he was a V.C.,” exclaimed Turner.

“ ‘ V.C.’ what is that ? ” asked Fanny, who did not take much interest in public matters.

“ Victoria Cross,” explained Mrs. Temple ; adding, “ I suppose Dr. Slade is well informed, but I was not aware of it.”

“ Couldn’t you find out ? couldn’t you ask him ? perhaps he wears it on his coat,” per-adventured Mr. Turner, junior, with true provincial curiosity.

“Why!” exclaimed Fanny indignantly, “you don’t suppose Mrs. Temple ever sees Sir Hugh! You don’t think she waits upon him every morning with a curtsey and a ‘What will you please to have for dinner, sir?’”

“I am sure I do not know,” he returned, bewildered.

“Do not mind her, Mr. Turner,” said Mrs. Temple, laughing good-humouredly. “She is always full of some nonsense. I fortunately have an excellent old friend, who manages my housekeeping, or I could not let lodgings and keep a shop at the same time.”

“Just so,” he returned; adding, to the indignation of Fanny, with an admiring glance, “But, I say, what a jolly girl you are!”

“I had a great mind,” said Fanny, when he had stepped away triumphantly, “to refuse their horrid supper on the spot; only I was afraid of you! Now I am like the Romans in Mrs. Markham, between the barbarians and the sea. You would be vexed if I don’t go, and Tom will be cross if I do!”

“I will bear you harmless with Tom. We must not be too distant with our neighbours; Tom will understand that. But, Fan, how is it you can condescend to accept Mr. Joseph’s

unspoken admiration, and yet be so indignant if he ventures to express it?"

"The humble adoration of the meanest votary may be offered at the loftiest shrine, but the smallest attempt at familiarity must be crushed," replied Fanny grandly. "Kate! you have not told me half enough about Sir Hugh!"

"There is really nothing to tell. He is a tall, thin, plain, tolerably well-bred, and, I should say, common-place man. You are a perfect nuisance with your questions! I think I shall fine you half-a-crown whenever you mention his name again."

"I am sure, Kate," resumed Fanny, with an air of the most profound wisdom after a few minutes' silence, "I hope our interesting lodger will not tell Dr. Slade that you wrote that letter for him. It will fly like wildfire through the town, and there will be no end of scandal."

The young widow coloured even to her brow. "I am proof against scandal," she exclaimed, with a scornful flash of her bright eyes; "I don't care!" Then, stopping short, "What nonsense one talks when angry! I must care—but," laughing, "it would be rather too bad to be 'talked of' with one's enemy."

A covey of Miss Monitor's young ladies entering prevented further conversation, and the counter was quickly strewn with all the colours of the rainbow in Berlin wool.

That evening as the two friends sat, the one making a dress, the other reading aloud to her, in the comfortable home-like 'shop parlour' which was their winter sitting-room, a knock at the door announced Dr. Slade, who generally looked in after visiting his patient.
"Come in," cried Fanny.

"Well, ladies," said he, entering, his shirt-frill in perfect condition, his eyes glittering, his large white teeth displayed by a gracious smile, as he glanced approvingly round the neat room, "you might sit for a picture of Industry rewarded by Comfort."

"Sit down, Doctor," said Mrs. Temple, placing a chair for him. "How is your patient this evening?"

"Not quite so well; and d——d sulky and silent, in consequence, I suppose. However, he made one query that afforded me satisfaction on your account, Mrs. Temple," taking out his snuff-box and tapping it while he assumed a tone of patronage. "Sir Hugh Galbraith interrupted me rather abruptly in what I was saying just now by exclaiming, 'I find that old

woman who answers my bell sometimes is not the landlady ?' So I explained that the real proprietress was engaged in the wool trade—ha ! ha ! ha !—therefore that he could not expect to see her. He nodded his head and puffed away for a while, and then burst out with, 'What do I pay for these rooms, Doctor?' so I explained that the subject of rent had really not been mentioned ; that he had been carried into the nearest place of refuge, and no one had thought of the question of payment. Then he said it was time to mention it, and that he was willing to pay whatever I thought, or whatever you thought was right. So I said the last inmate paid two pounds a week ; but I thought that, considering he necessarily caused some extra trouble—he interrupted in his impatient, overbearing way, 'Of course, of course! Will three pounds a week do ?' I said I thought it would suffice ; but said I would mention the matter to you. I assure you I am very pleased to have secured you so eligible a—eh ! what amuses you, Miss Lee?"

This interjection was uttered in consequence of a sudden outburst of laughter from Fanny, all the more noisy from her efforts to suppress it.

“What is the matter?” exclaimed Mrs. Temple, smiling from sympathy.

“Oh, nothing! do forgive me!” exclaimed Fanny, struggling to compose herself. “I ran the needle into my finger, and it startled me. I am rather hysterical, you know.”

“Hysterical! stuff!” growled the Doctor. “You are the picture of health; but what do you say, Mrs. Temple?”

“That your patient is disposed to pay munificently; and it would be a pity to check his liberality, for I suppose he will not be with us long.”

“A few weeks longer, if he is wise. He asked me this evening when I thought he might travel, and seemed disgusted that I could not undertake to say when. After such a shock as he has had, quiet is essential. It is curious he has had no other visitors except that starched high-mightiness of a cousin.”

Mrs. Temple was not disposed to pursue the subject, so the talk flowed towards other topics, and the Doctor mentioned having been called over to Weston to see the housekeeper, and that Lady Styles was still absent, and would be for some time longer, as Sir Marmaduke Styles had been attacked by rheumatism, and heaven knows what all, in Yorkshire.

"I am sorry for him," added the Doctor, "but if her ladyship had been at home all Pierstoffe could not have prevented her from forcing her way into Sir Hugh Galbraith's room, though if any one could have turned her out again it would have been the sufferer himself."

After a little more conversation, principally carried on by the Doctor and Fanny, he bade the friends good evening, rather to their relief.

"What made you laugh in that extraordinary way, Fanny?" asked Mrs. Temple, when they were alone.

"Oh! dear Kate, I could not help it! when I heard that ridiculous old doctor talking so big about the tenant he had secured for you, and the splendid offer of three pounds a week out of your own money—for it is, or ought to be, your own money."

Mrs. Temple laughed for a moment. "The position is altogether very droll," she said, "and very uncomfortable; but as to the money, I am not so sure. I should think at the worst of *his* times Sir Hugh could pay three pounds a week on a pinch."

"Then he was quite rich for an old bachelor, and need not have quarrelled and worried about poor Mr. Travers' money," exclaimed

Fanny, indignantly. “But it is evident he never mentioned your having written a letter for him; and, *à propos*, I will just write to Tom before I go to bed, and only say that our interesting invalid is going on as well as can be expected.”

The afternoon of the next day was a busy one, and in the midst of it Mrs. Temple received a telegraphic summons from Mills through the little window.

“Well, what is it, Mills?”

“He says he would be greatly obliged, ma’am, if you could spare a few minutes to write a letter for him.”

“You mean Sir Hugh? indeed I cannot! Say I am exceedingly occupied, and if he can put off his letter till the evening, I am sure Dr. Slade would write for him.”

So Mills departed and did not return.

“It would never do to come when he calls,” thought the young widow, as she diligently sought through a pile of ‘London Journals’ for a back number to suit a schoolboy customer; “nor am I going to be his amanuensis always.”

It was an amusing task to attire Fanny and despatch her to her tea and supper engagement. The mixture of readiness and re-

luctance with which she prepared herself was most characteristic, as was the undisguised pleasure with which she surveyed her dress and herself in the largest looking-glass their very moderate furnishing could boast, and her openly expressed regret that so much trouble and success should be so thrown away.

“ If Tom was to be there, or even some of those pleasant, merry hussars I used to meet at Mrs. Danby’s! Heigho! Kate, dear, I really would like to run in and show myself to Sir Hugh !”

“ Fanny, Fanny ! that looks like going over to the enemy.”

“ Nothing of the kind, dear ; I am ready for war to the knife ! even though I am not fit to be anything more than the knife-grinder.”

“ The knife-grinder, in such a warfare as ours will be (if it ever begins), is a very important personage,” returned Mrs. Temple. “ I suppose the lawyers will be the knife-grinders.”

“ Ah ! there will be no more peace once that begins,” said Fanny. Mrs. Temple made no reply, seeming lost in thought, and Fanny went on : “ Do, like a dear ! write a line to

Tom this evening and explain everything, and ask him to write to me. After all, though he thinks rather much of himself, he is the dearest, best fellow in the world ! Good-bye ! Be sure you send for me at nine, or half past."



CHAPTER II.

MATE settled herself to perform her task of writing to Tom as soon as she had finished a little domestic talk with Mills, who informed her that Dr. Slade had called early, while she was dressing Miss Fanny, for he was going out to dinner, so Sir Hugh's servant had told Mills, as he passed through the kitchen, to go on some errand for his master. Safe, therefore, from interruption, Mrs. Temple wrote rapidly and fully to her prime counsellor. After explaining her reasons for making Fanny accept Mrs. Turner's invitation, and taking the whole blame of that transaction on herself, she went on to say that she wished very much he would

endeavour to see Ford, apparently by accident, to ascertain if he kept up any intercourse with Poole ; "for," she wrote, "although I am reluctant to confess what must seem unreasonable suspicions to you, mine have for some time pointed to Ford. Why, I am reluctant to say. When I make up my mind to tell you, perhaps you will admit I am somewhat justified. At any rate, accept such guidance from me, as to direct your inquiries towards this man. Ascertain, if you can, whether he has sought out Gregory's son, or made him any offer. Is Poole still in the old house, or has Sir Hugh Galbraith——"

As she traced the name Mills entered.

"He has been ringing again," said she,—Mills seemed to fulfil some self-imposed duty by religiously avoiding the name of her mistress' enemy,—“and he wants to know if it would be perfectly convenient to you to write a bit for him now; he is very sorry to trouble you.”

“I will come in ten minutes,” replied Mrs. Temple, without raising her eyes, or ceasing to write. “Tell him so, please.”

Mills retreated, grumbling vaguely.

Sir Hugh Galbraith was pacing slowly to and fro when she entered. He turned and

greeted her with grave politeness, placing a chair at the table, and moving the writing materials; in doing so he upset some of them, which Mrs. Temple hastened to pick up, with the strange weft of compassion that, since she had seen him carried helpless and inanimate into her home, had shot across the warp of her dislike.

"I have to apologise very heartily," said Galbraith, "for trespassing so perseveringly on your time, but I ventured to think that you might be more at leisure in the evening, and I really want a letter despatched."

"I am disengaged now," returned Mrs. Temple, seating herself at once, and getting pen and paper, "but I never am in the morning or afternoon."

"I shall remember," said Galbraith, as if he intended frequent employment of his fair hostess. Some such idea suggested itself to her, and, strive as she would, she could not restrain a smile, all the softer and sweeter from the effort to be grave. She kept her eyes steadily on the paper, however, and her resolute composure quickly returned. Sir Hugh took his place on the sofa opposite to her. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"I am."

"My dear Upton. I had yours of the 2nd, yesterday. It crossed one I sent you the same day. I now write to say it is exceedingly unlikely I can be in London for some weeks." He stopped, at a sign from his amanuensis. "I feel very shaky still," he resumed, "and must keep quiet, so tell your friend to put me out of his head as a possible purchaser of his horse."

Again a long pause. Mrs. Temple read aloud her last word, to show she had finished, and still no others came. Thinking that he was in the agonies of composition, she kept silence for a moment, and once more, as a reminder, read softly, "purchaser of his horse," looking up as she spoke. She met Galbraith's eyes fixed upon her, as if so absorbed in contemplation that everything else was forgotten, and yet there was no shade of boldness in his grave reflective gaze. Conjecture and admiration might be described, especially the former, but nothing to offend; still Mrs. Temple could not keep down the quick bright blush that flushed her cheek, and then faded slowly away, leaving her paler than before.

"Forgive me," said Sir Hugh, bluntly, yet in less harsh tones than he had hitherto spoken; and leaning his sound arm on the

table, he bent towards her. “ I had forgotten what I was about, while wondering what freak of fortune drove you to keep a shop ! ” Again Mrs. Temple’s lip curved with a passing smile, and before she could reply Galbraith went on hastily, “ I am aware that such remarks are altogether presumptuous, unwarrantable, but I could not keep the words back.”

“ As you are suffering, and I imagine very dull, I suppose I must not quarrel with you for amusing yourself with speculations concerning my insignificant history ! You will find it much more interesting in imagination than in reality, so I shall not enlighten you.”

Mrs. Temple looked straight into his eyes as she spoke, something of the dislike and defiance that had struck him so forcibly at first returning to her expression.

“ You do not suppose I would venture to ask ? ” he returned quickly.

“ Suppose we finish your letter,” said Mrs. Temple quietly.

“ Yes, yes, of course ; where was I ? ”

“ ‘ As a possible purchaser of his horse,’ ” read Mrs. Temple, demurely.

“ Ah ! — h’m — ” Galbraith’s ideas evidently would not come. “ I really have nothing more to say—you must just end it, if you please.”

"But that is so abrupt! Can you not tell your friend how you are going on—when you are likely to leave—but I must beg pardon in my turn. I am going out of my province."

"I am very thankful for any suggestion," replied Galbraith. "Say I am still confoundedly weak, and fear I cannot move for four or five weeks, but that I am in capital quarters."

A pause.

"'Capital quarters,'" read Mrs. Temple, looking up with an unrestrained smile, so bright and frank that it seemed a gleam of real light. "Shall I add, 'and a secretary on the premises?'"

"If you like," replied Sir Hugh, also relaxing into a smile. "But that is self-evident. Will you add, that as soon as I am strong enough I shall join him in Dublin, if he thinks he can manage to get away to the west for some trout fishing?"

Mrs. Temple bent her head, and wrote on quickly and steadily; presently she pressed the page on the blotting-paper, and presented it for Galbraith's signature, holding it as before with a firm, still, white hand.

"You don't know how much obliged to you I am," he said, pausing with the pen in his hand, and looking up in her face with his

grave, sombre eyes, which had a sort of yearning expression at times. "I should be badly off without your help. As to letting that Doctor write for me, I should let everything go to smash for want of a line, first. He is an infernal gossip—I mean a confirmed gossip."

"Yes, that is better," said Mrs. Temple, softly and gravely. "I should think gossip too weak a diversion for the Inferno ! a devil is nothing if he is not strong!"

Sir Hugh looked at her with increasing curiosity ; there was such a contrast between her words and the gentle accent with which they were uttered.

"That is one's idea of a devil, certainly," he returned.

"Had you not better sign your letter, and let it be posted ? My good old Mills is going to fetch my young friend and assistant, who is out this evening ; she can post it for you."

"Thank you ; and I am keeping you standing."

Galbraith hastily scrawled a hieroglyphic at the end of his letter, and handed it back to his fair secretary, who proceeded deliberately to fold and address it.

"There is sealing-wax somewhere," said

Sir Hugh, who was by no means anxious to shorten the operation ; “ I think it had better be sealed.”

“ Very well,” she replied, searching among the writing things. “ But I cannot see any. If you want some, Sir Hugh Galbraith,” pronouncing his name rather slowly, and for the first time, “ I *sell* the article, and will be happy to supply you—an excellent quality twopence per stick, first-rate threepence !”

She paused as she said this, resting one hand on the table, and looking quietly at him, but with a sort of suppressed sparkle under her long lashes.

“ And I shall be delighted to become your customer,” returned Galbraith, laughing. “ Shall I ring for your housekeeper to——”

“ Oh ! I know where to find it, and will not keep you a moment,” interrupted Mrs. Temple.

“ But it gives you so much trouble !”

“ Consider the unexpected sale of twopenny-worth of sealing-wax—or shall we say threepence ?”

She left the room as she spoke, swiftly but without hurry, and Galbraith was still smiling and pulling his moustaches when she returned with two pieces of sealing-wax and a lighted

taper. “Twopence,” said she, holding up one piece ; then, raising the other, added “threepence.”

“The first quality, of course,” said Sir Hugh, laughing, and with a brighter expression than she had yet seen upon his countenance.

“Now for a seal ; I could not see any.”

“I have my ring,” interrupted Sir Hugh.

“Which you cannot get off,” said Mrs. Temple, “so I brought you one, with the latest motto, ‘Reply quickly.’ Will that do?”

“Very well indeed ; your forethought is admirable, Mrs. Temple. You would make a good general.”

“I trust I may prove a successful one, when my battle begins,” said the young widow with a sigh, looking down at the seal she was affixing ; she could neither account for, nor resist the impulse to bring her masked batteries into play. Never before had she felt the same vivid interest as in the daring game on which she had ventured ; and which, even while it half frightened her, she could not relinquish. If she could only get well through it, and accomplish Galbraith’s chastisement before Tom could find out what was going on, or interfere, or even look disapprobation ; for she dearly loved her kindly, pleasant, honest

counsellor, and highly valued his good opinion. Still, the game was worth the candle ; she only intended to bring down her foe from his proud pre-eminence, not to hurt him seriously ; but while she thought, Galbraith was saying,

“ Is there a fight before you, then ? ”

“ Yes ; a worse than you were ever in—a legal battle.”

“ I am sorry to hear it ; a law-suit is a serious affair. I was very near launching into one myself, and I don’t feel quite sure I am safe yet.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Mrs. Temple, pausing, as she closed the ink-bottle, and looking up quickly and keenly in his face, forgetting everything save the desire to glean some straw of intelligence to show her how the current was setting. “ Indeed, but if you *do* drift into such a contest, you have wealth, and rank, and influence. I have nothing, and am nobody.” A sweet arch smile. “ Nevertheless, once the fight begins, believe me, I will stand to my guns as long as I have a round of ammunition, Sir Hugh Galbraith ; so good-evening.”

“ One moment,” he exclaimed, eagerly ; for he was marvellously roused and stirred. “ I wished to speak to you about a—one or two things.”

"And they are?" asked Mrs. Temple, pausing in her retreat.

"Oh—ah!—I hope my fellow, Jackson, gives no unnecessary trouble to Mrs. What's-her-name?—that he behaves properly. These troopers are rough customers; but Jackson and I have gone through a campaign together, and he suits me much better than a fine-gentleman valet." For once in his life, Galbraith was talking against time, though thinking himself an idiot all the while.

"He seems to get on very well with Mills," said Mrs. Temple, feeling anxious to retire. "I hear no complaint. I hope you have all you require, and are comfortable. I feel I ought to justify Dr. Slade's recommendation."

"I never was in better quarters," returned Sir Hugh; "and if you will be so good as to write a letter for me occasionally, there is nothing else I can want; but," seeing her about to speak, "I will *not* have Slade for a secretary."

"Well, we will try and manage your correspondence for you," said Mrs. Temple, good-humouredly; and repeating her "good evening," moved decidedly to the door.

Galbraith's resources were exhausted, so he opened it for her, exclaiming, "I am sorry for

your opposite party in the coming battle, Mrs. Temple. You are a dangerous antagonist."

"I will endeavour to be dangerous, depend upon it," said she ; and bending her head in return for his bow, she swept away without raising her eyes.

"That woman has a history," thought Sir Hugh, closing the door after her. "Yet how fresh, and fair, and young she looks. She is a gentlewoman ; she must be a gentlewoman; there's not a tinge of anything bold in her fearless frankness. How much more pluck Upton has in some things than I have. Had he been in my place, now--by Jove ! he would have asked her to pull off his ring to seal that letter ; I daren't. After all, would he have dared ? I doubt it. I wonder what the late Temple was like ? A white-chokered elder of some Methodist chapel, probably. These tradesmen are all dissenting radical hounds ! How could such a woman as that marry one of these fellows ; she never learnt that style, those manners, behind a counter. By George ! perhaps—" he stopped even from consecutive thought, as some conjecture possibly more repulsive than the Methodist husband, suggested itself ; and with a look of anger and disgust,

addressed himself to the task of lighting a cigar with a twist of paper, which burnt his fingers, and evoked some bad language before he succeeded.

Fanny returned in due course, escorted both by Mrs. Mills and Joseph, junior ; she was considerably less bright than when she started. “Oh ! they were very kind and hospitable,” she said, in reply to some inquiries from her friend ; “but I was obliged to eat a great deal more than was good for me ; and then we had an adorable young man from Stoneborough, and another who sells fish, I think. The Stoneborough-man is evidently Miss Turner’s property. The fishmonger, I flatter myself, fell to my spear. He wasn’t nice—and Mr. Joseph lamented to me privately, as we walked home, that his parents had done him irreparable injury at his baptism, by bestowing such a ridiculous name upon him. I consoled him to the best of my power, and advised him to turn it into Beppo—the idea pleased him ; but he wanted to know who Beppo was. So I exclaimed, ‘What ! an admirer of Byron not know one of his leading characters.’ At which he was annihilated, and we arrived here in peace. I was so glad he said no more, because I began to be afraid

Beppo wasn't in Byron at all. But he is, isn't he, Kate?"

Mrs. Temple reassured her.

"Then he proposed driving me and his sister over to Stoneborough, which was alarming. And oh, they perfectly stupefied me with questions about Sir Hugh. Never send me there again, Kate."

"I think we had better let him know you are engaged."

"But I am not; not regularly, you know; only if—"

"Fanny! do you consider yourself free to marry any one?"

"Well—no, not exactly."

"That is quite enough. We had better say good-night."

"And what have you been doing all the long evening?" said Fanny, yawning.

"Nothing particular. I have read; written one letter to Tom, and another for my enemy."

"Another for Sir Hugh! Oh! my goodness, Kate."

"Yes; and he coolly declares we must manage his correspondence for him. He will not have Dr. Slade. So as he will be here but a short time, we must make the best of it; only you must do your share."

"Me! I should be afraid to go near him, after what Tom said."

"Nonsense, Fan; he is a quiet, civil, grave personage, more like a parson than a soldier; though, I fancy, full of pride and prejudice; but come, let to-morrow take care of itself—to bed, to bed, to bed."

A few days passed unmarked by any event; for Sir Hugh Galbraith's requirements and correspondence had become almost a daily occupation. Fanny had been sent once in Mrs. Temple's place, and had returned utterly discomfited. "I knew I should make a mess of it," she said. "I never saw such a cold, proud, stern, disagreeable man. I went in trembling, and he made me shake in my shoes! the sort of bow he made and the stare he gave, was enough to turn one to stone. And oh, the muddle I got into with the letter—writing the same thing over two or three times, and leaving out other bits; even Sir Hugh laughed at last, and said, 'You are not quite so good an amanuensis as your sister.' Then I exclaimed, 'She is not my sister;' and, perhaps, I ought not to have said so. I will not write any more for him, Kate! that I can tell you."

Meantime, Tom had not been idle; and in

due time Kate received a report of his proceedings.

"Your suggestions are very good," wrote the London agent of the Berlin Bazaar; "and so far as I can I will carry them out; but it is not so easy to invent an accident that will bring me in contact with Ford. I am not in a position to require a stockbroker, and if I were, your views would not incline me to entrust much capital in his hands. However, I will be on the look out. I could not manage to see Gregory till last night; and, curious enough, your ideas are so far justified, that Ford has called upon him, but did not see him, as Captain Gregory was out. So far, the stars in their courses fight for you! I warned Gregory to say nothing of the will, beyond the bare fact of knowing that his father drew one for Mr. Travers, also to keep his communications with myself, and the affidavit, as dark as possible. This, I think, the worthy captain will do, as he has a prejudice against Ford, because of his supposed injustice to 'father.' I think, therefore, Gregory is armed at all points; at the same time, I must say that your suspicions of Ford seem to me, to say the least, unfounded. What object could he possibly have in be-

stowing so great a benefit on a man, who would unhesitatingly hand him over to the powers that punish if he found out the fraud; for even you do not imagine Sir Hugh would be a party to it. I cannot help thinking that your best plan would be, now you have such a curious opportunity, to make Galbraith's acquaintance, see what sort of a fellow he is, and then let me come down and negotiate between you. I am certain he would make a very much better settlement in this way than the lawyers proposed. And after all, you wished him to have a fair share of the property. The fact is, that although an advanced Liberal, I cannot reconcile myself to think of you and Fanny always behind a counter, and open to the addresses of any accomplished Turner of your society. It may do for a picturesque episode, but will never answer in the long run. Think over my proposition, and don't reject it with scorn right off. Thank Fan for her description of the supper, and say she *might* write a little more legibly, &c., &c."

"Make terms with Hugh Galbraith—never! unless I dictate them," was Kate's mental comment on this epistle. "For even if the discovery of another will released me

from any compromise I might have made, I should feel bound in honour not to look for one. It is deplorable that this wrong-headed man should have so mortally offended poor Mr. Travers ! All would have gone right then. Why should he despise me so fiercely, at least the ‘me’ he thinks I am ?” a half-pleased smile parted her lips as she thought. “ But to submit to the will that placed me at his feet—at his mercy—never ! As to the rest, I think he likes me : I have set the wheel in motion, but can I stop it ?”

Kate pondered long and vaguely. Though she had been a wife, she knew nothing of love or lovers, save from books, which she was inclined to believe greatly exaggerated the subject. Matrimony had been a most prosaic and disenchanting condition to her, and though too natural and sympathetic a woman to be indifferent to admiration, her own heart was almost an unsolved mystery to her, and she scarcely believed in love. Freedom, knowledge, movement, colour ; pleasant friends, and the power of serving them ; a bright home, and the power of embellishing it—these were her outlines of happiness. For the present it was infinitely amusing to play with Galbraith’s evident

curiosity and dawning admiration, which by relaxing his mental fibres, would do a man of that description infinitely more good than harm ; and, come what might, she felt no fear of consequences to herself, as she was quite resolved to act the prudent, quiet landlady to the last.

Absorbed in her own thoughts, she had not noticed the flight of time, and was startled by the entrance of Fanny.

“ It is quite seven, isn’t it ? ” said that young lady, looking at a watch which lay on a stand. “ The boy may put up the shutters ? I am quite tired of staying there by myself, in the dusk, and it would be sinful to light up for nothing.”

“ Oh, yes, dear,” returned Kate, folding up her letter ; “ it is quite time to close.” So saying, she stirred the fire and lit the lamp, for one of the charms of the “ shop parlour ” was, that it had no gas. It was, as has been said before, a low, wainscotted room, with a wide, tiled fireplace and carved oak mantel-shelf, over which was a tall, narrow glass, with old-fashioned girandoles at each side. A few bits of good old china enlivened it, and a couple of gay prints under the girandoles finished it off pleasantly.

The objectionable horsehair chairs and sofas had been covered with bright chintz. A sort of sideboard of stained wood ran along the side of the room opposite the fire, with a cupboard at each end, and open shelves in the centre filled with books. This was adorned by a saucer or two full of moss and primroses prettily arranged, and a tiny pierced flower-vase of raised Dresden ware was stuck full of violets, scenting the room with their delicate fragrance.

The lamp stood on a solid, old-fashioned, octagon table, which had been rescued from a remote corner of the house, and its cover of rich red cloth gave just the amount of colour to complete the picture of a pleasant, unpretending interior, which nevertheless had the indefinable expression in its general effect which bespoke the presence of gentlewomen.

When Mrs. Mills brought in the tea-kettle and equipage, she observed to her mistress, “I made a couple of rounds of buttered toast, ma’am, for you didn’t eat much dinner; and he”—a motion of the hand upwards—“wants his letters wrote as usual; and he desired me to say that, if you like, he will come down here to save you the trouble of going up to him.”

"I really think it would be better," said Mrs. Temple, looking at Fanny.

"Perhaps so; but if you once let him in you will never get rid of him—that's my opinion," returned Fanny, sagely.

"My compliments, Mills; say we are just going to tea, and afterwards we shall be happy to write for him, if he chooses to come down, unless he would like a cup of tea."

"Oh, Kate!" cried Fanny; "what would Tom say?"

"That I am heaping coals of fire on my enemy's head! It is so churlish to tell him to wait till we have done eating."

"Am I to say that?" asked Mills, with unmistakable disapprobation.

"No, no!" cried Kate laughing. "It would be cruel to let him devour your toast, Mills. Say I will receive him after tea."

That meal had hardly been despatched, and the things cleared away, when a knock at the door announced their visitor.

He paused a moment, as if struck by the simple, graceful comfort of the room. Mrs. Temple rose and advanced a step to receive him. "I am glad you are so much better," she said, "as to venture downstairs."

Fanny murmured, "Good evening," and dropped a slight curtsey.

"Thank you for permitting me to come ! I must trouble you with a very short letter this evening," returned Sir Hugh.

"Sit near the fire," said Kate, feeling it was a totally different matter, receiving him in her parlour, from visiting him in his.

"What a pleasant, cheerful room this is," he observed, taking the chair indicated ; "quite different from mine."

Fanny observed that he had discarded his dressing gown, and, although only in a velveteen shooting coat, was got up with some care. He was certainly tall and gaunt, and plain, but had, she thought, a soldierly, distinguished air.

Meantime she settled herself to her needle-work in demure silence, and Mrs. Temple, producing pen, ink, and paper, replied to Sir Hugh's remark, "You must not disparage my drawing-room, it is the pride of my house."

"Oh, it is very nice indeed ! but it is somehow rather desolate."

"Shall I begin ?" said Kate.

"Yes, if you please."

"Dear Sirs,—I feel somewhat surprised not to have heard again from you on the subject of yours of 2nd inst."

Kate, having written this, looked up.

"That's 'all,'" said Sir Hugh. "Will you direct it to Messrs. Payne and Layton, Gray's Inn?"

Mrs. Temple obeyed in silence, with an odd sense of danger. What if by chance it fell into Mr. Wall's hands? He knew her writing so well, what would he think? She could only hope it would not.

Fanny, in the meantime watching Galbraith sign his name, could not hold her tongue any longer. "How hard it must be to write with one's left hand," said she, timidly.

"The result is not very satisfactory," replied Sir Hugh. "At any rate, it could not be easily imitated."

A long pause ensued. Galbraith was evidently in no hurry to go away, and Mrs. Temple would not start any topic of conversation. At last Sir Hugh observed that he hoped, from what Slade had told him, to be able to write his own letters in another month.

"How nice that will be!" exclaimed Fanny.

"Because you will then be freed from the chance of having to write for me?" asked Galbraith with a good-humoured smile.

"Oh, no! I did not mean that!" she cried, blushing very prettily.

"Fanny was dreadfully distressed at having been so indifferent a secretary the other day," said Mrs. Temple.

"It was as much my fault as hers," replied Sir Hugh, turning his eyes full upon Kate as she spoke. "You teach me how to dictate as we go on. You seem to understand your work thoroughly."

"I used to write a good deal for poor Mr.—I mean my husband," returned Kate, pulling herself up just in time.

"Ah! I suppose he was also in business?"

"He was. All my people were."

"Except me," said Fanny, quickly; "that is the reason I am so little good now."

Galbraith then made some remark on the probable age of the house, which led to a discussion on the origin and rise of Pierstoffs; and Mrs. Temple promised to look out a quaint history of —shire she had bought at a book stall, where some interesting particulars were to be found respecting their present locality. Then Fanny, with some dexterity, turned the conversation to India, and induced Sir Hugh to give some description of the country and its sports. The moments flew quickly, till Mrs. Temple, glancing at her watch, said, smiling, "In the

absence of Dr. Slade, I must remind you that invalids must keep early hours."

"I fear I have intruded too long," returned Sir Hugh, rising. "I am greatly obliged to you for the relief of a little society."

"Well, Kate," said Fanny, when he was quite gone, "if it was not my duty to hate Sir Hugh Galbraith, I should say he was rather awful, but very nice."



CHAPTER III.

TRIMBLED sun and keen wind were playing havoc with the old and infirm, the weak-lunged and the rheumatic, in famous London town about a month after Sir Hugh Galbraith's accident, and Tom Reed was walking thoughtfully down the Strand, after witnessing the last rehearsal of his smart little piece previous to its production. His thoughts were agreeable. After a long, brave struggle with fortune, she was beginning to yield coyly to his embrace. He was tolerably sure of the editorship of the "*Thresher*," should P—— not be able to resume that office, and altogether he felt it due to himself, to Fanny, to Mrs. Travers, that he

should run down to Pierstoffer on Saturday and have a talk with them. "I have not heard from either for two or three days," thought Tom; "I suppose Galbraith is gone by this time: what a curious eddy of circumstances that he should be carried into Mrs. Travers's house! I wish she would hear reason about that will. It was an infamous affair, but she will never upset it—Oh, Mr. Ford!"

This exclamation was elicited by a gentleman who stopped suddenly before him, so as to arrest his progress.

"Mr. Reed," he returned, "I was determined not to let you pass me as you did before."

"Did I?" cried Tom, shaking hands with him; "where?"

"At the Exhibition of Water-colours; but you had some ladies with you, so I did not speak."

"Well, I am very much obliged to you for stopping me now; I was lost in thought. How have you been this age? Why, it is just a year since I saw you."

"Yes! just a year," echoed Ford. "Oh! I am quite well—never was better." But he did not look so. He was thinner and more

haggard than of old, and had a more restless, shifty expression than ever in his eyes. "Have you been always in town?" he continued. "I thought you must have been away, from never meeting you."

Tom's caution was aroused by the sort of suppressed eagerness underlying his efforts at easy cordiality.

"Yes, I may say I have, except for a night or two, and one short run to the Continent; but I have been desperately busy, and our lines are not likely to cross."

"Exactly so," said Ford. "I will turn with you as far as Hungerford Market. Pray, have you any news of our friends Mrs. Travers and Miss Lee?"

"Yes; I had a letter from Mrs. Travers a short time ago; they were quite well—flourishing, in short."

"At Wiesbaden?"

"I am not at liberty to say where," said Tom Reed, smiling pleasantly.

"I should have imagined," returned Ford, with the old, nervous catch in his voice, "that, considering the long-standing acquaintance I had with Mrs. Travers, and the devotion I ever showed to her interest, an exception might be made in my favour."

"I dare say she would herself; but you must see I couldn't."

"Well, Mr. Reed, will you satisfy me on one point?—is she living in tolerable comfort? Is her plan of a school succeeding?"

"I assure you, Mr. Ford, she is very comfortable at present, and her plan is fairly successful."

"Fairly successful," repeated Ford, thoughtfully. "Well, I too have been fairly successful, and have some idea of taking a holiday this summer in order to enjoy a trip on the Continent. Should my presence annoy Mrs. Travers, I would avoid any town she resided in—if you would tell me where she is!"

"Nonsense!" cried Tom; "I dare say she would be very pleased to see any 'auld acquaintance.'"

"But you forget, Mr. Reed," with a wavering, mechanical smile, "I was unfortunately the means of discovering that unlucky, that disgraceful will; I even placed it in her hands; and, innocent as I am, I fear she will never forgive me."

"I think you do Mrs. Travers injustice," said Tom; "she is not that sort of person."

"But ladies" (Ford would not have said 'women' for the world) "ladies are not always

very just in their conclusions ; though, of course, *you* must see that I was quite an involuntary agent."

" Of course, of course," said Tom, yet a strange doubt seemed to come to him, even while Ford was protesting his innocence. " What are you doing now ?" he continued, to change the subject.

" Oh, I am working up a tolerable business as a ship-broker and insurer—underwriting on a small scale ; but I should be very happy to see you, Mr. Reed, any evening you are inclined to look in at my place. I have changed my quarters ; stay, here is my card."

" Thank you. I fancy you had better look in on me, No. 6, —— Court, Temple ; I am more in your way coming out of the City—and tell me what is ' Travers & Co.' doing ?"

" Winding up as fast as they can. Sir Hugh Galbraith had a bad fall out hunting, I saw by the papers."

" Yes, I heard so. By the way, do you ever see anything of Poole, the fellow who was one of the witnesses to that unfortunate will ?"

" No ; do you know anything of him ?"

" Not much ; but I am afraid he is not in very good hands, and has a dangerous taste for the turf."

"A great mistake on his part."

"Well, I must leave you, for I have to meet a man at the House of Commons at two. By-the-by, I have a play coming out at the 'Lesbian' to-morrow night. I'll send you orders if you like." "Must keep him in sight," thought Tom to himself, "though there's not much to be got out of him."

"Thank you," returned Ford, "I should very much like to go. By the way, as I presume you have Mrs. Travers' address"—Tom nodded—"perhaps you would have no objection to forward a letter for me to her?"

"None whatever," exclaimed Tom; "send it under cover to me; she shall have it, and will reply, I have no doubt, in due course."

"So I suppose," said Ford, stiffly; "why should she not?"

"Why, indeed?" replied Tom, politely and indefinitely. "Good-morning."

So they parted. Reed hurrying on to his appointment, and thinking what a worthy, respectable, tiresome prig Ford was, in spite of a spasm of suspicion that once shot across him as they were speaking, but which had vanished as the conversation continued. "He is evidently full of thought and sympathy

for his late employer's widow. I wonder why she is so inveterate against him; it is not like her to be so unreasonable. To be sure, I have never heard her reasons."

Ford plodded moodily on to take a boat at Hungerford Stairs. He was evidently in deep thought; he jostled in an unconscious way against several passers-by, and stood so lost in his own reflections upon the platform that he missed one boat, and would have missed a second, had not an amphibious creature, with a rope in his hand, called out in stentorian tones, "Now, then, where are you for?" His face looked older, greyer, and more pained in expression when he stepped ashore at London Bridge than when he parted with Tom Reed half an hour before. Perhaps all the grief and disappointment, the smouldering indignation, the bitter sense of being undervalued, and, worse than all, the unconfessed consciousness that he could not rely upon himself; all these vultures which gnawed and tortured him, more or less at times, had not in them such elements of tragedy as in two words which seemed to trace themselves on the atmosphere before him, and on the thought within him; they were—"in vain."

If Mr. Ford had been a tall, dignified pa-

trician with a schedule of debts and a doubtful past, or an eager, fiery democrat, burning to right the wrongs of every one under the sun, but leaving his children to fight their own battles the best way they could, the task of dissecting such characters—demonstrating their defects, demanding admiration for their nobler aspects, asking sympathy for their trials, compassion for their weakness, and justice tempered by mercy for the total—would be deemed no unworthy task for a novelist's or biographer's pen. But when the subject "of the sketch" is a middle-aged man, of middle height and sloping shoulders—of good business capacities, of undoubted integrity, of unimpeached morality, guiltless of any excess, his principal recreation a mild taste for art and a keen ambition to be attired as becomes a swell—which of our young lady readers would care to be informed how vanity and weakness combined to ruin and corrode much that was good, and how in a man, whose life of quiet, unvaried work knew little that was bright, an intense, unresisted passion, too strong for the character it dominated, mastered his reason and drove him into the wilderness where right and wrong were confounded in outer darkness.

Tom Reed had finished his letter to Mrs. Temple, describing his interview with Ford, the day following. He had written it at intervals, as the interruptions of the M. T. office would permit, and perhaps less clearly than usual, as he was somewhat excited by the event which was to come off that evening at the "Lesbian." "You may depend on my posting you a line with the result, good or bad, before I sleep to-night." He had just added this as a P.S., when a boy—an inky boy—in shirt-sleeves, entered with a crumpled card on which was inscribed "Mr. J. D. Trapes."

"What a —— nuisance!" growled Tom; "I can't see him. You did not say I was in, did you?"

"No, sir, I said I'd see."

"And so did I," cried a thick voice behind him; a loud laugh ensued, and Mr. J. D. Trapes presented himself.

"Excuse me! I really do want a few words with you, most particularly, or I shouldn't intrude. Reed, it's a shame for you to deny yourself to an old friend."

"Must do so in the office, you see; or we would get no work done," returned Tom, putting the best face he could on it, as he shook

his visitor's hand. "And as time is precious, what can I do for you?"

"Oh, a great many things! Fork out a fiver; put your name to a little bill at thirty-one days; give me three to five against 'Leonidas' just to square my book. Lots of things, which I know you won't do! However, the thing I really want won't cost much. Who is the man you were speaking to in the Strand yesterday, just by the turn to Hungerford Market?"

"Why? What do you want to know about him?" asked Tom, with a sudden dim sense of a necessity for caution.

"I only want his name and address. I have a strong idea he is a fellow I have lost sight of for some time, that owes me a pot of money."

"Oh! then I am sure it cannot be my friend," said Tom, laughing. "Ford never owed any one sixpence, I am quite sure."

"Ford, did you say?" repeated the other, sharply. "No, that was not the name. Who is he?"

"He is a ship-broker, I believe; he was the head clerk in a large City house."

"So was my man," returned Trapes, carelessly. "What was the firm?"

“Travers & Co.”

“Ay! I remember; you used to go down to Hampton Court to see old Travers’s widow. Saw her with you once in Bushey Park! Sly dog! Something wrong with the will, eh?”

“How the deuce do you know?”

“Aha! I know lots of things that would surprise you, though I am a failure and you have shot ahead. Reed! we’ve changed places since we were first acquainted.”

“I am sorry to hear you talk like that, Trapes,” said Tom, kindly. “If you feel yourself going down, why don’t you stop and turn round?”

“It’s easy to talk,” returned the other, with various expletives, which must not be reproduced here. “Did you ever know a man stop and turn round, once he was fairly set a-going down hill? If you catch him before he is over the brow, well and good, you may put on the drag; but not after—not after!” he repeated, gloomily. Then, brightening up, if such an expression could be applied to a face like his, and before Tom could speak, he went on: “The fact is, I never could plod. I never was like you. I wanted to go the pace from the beginning, and I went it! too much quick-

silver in my veins. Eh, my boy. Never mind, I begin to see my way to a good thing, and if I succeed I'll reform ! —— if I don't. Look here now. What does respectability and morality, and all the rest of it mean ? A good coat on your back, a good balance at your banker's. But look at the difference : you are a jolly good fellow if you can pay for your vices, or virtues—upon my soul I believe they are convertible terms—but an infernal blackguard and a blockhead to boot, if you can't. Look here, Reed ; I dare say you think you are a —— cleverer fellow than I am ; but I can tell you, you are not ; you are steady and industrious, which, being interpreted, generally means a sneak and a grubber ; nothing personal intended, you know ! and look where you are.”

“ Well,” said Tom, good-humouredly, seeing his old acquaintance had had something stronger than tea for his breakfast. “ I am glad your free translation was not personally intended ; and I am very glad you have something good in prospect ; in the meantime——”

“ In the meantime,” interrupted Trapes, coarsely, “ you'll lend me five pounds till times mend.”

“No, I shall not,” said Tom, still good-humoured, but decided. “I will gladly try to put you in the way of earning something; you used to turn out good work; for I am quite ready to admit you are a cleverer fellow than myself. Why, you ought to do something even in copying. You wrote, and probably still write, a capital hand!”

“Not quite so steady as it used to be,” replied the other, with a leer. “But you are right; it’s a capital hand, and it shall make me a capitalist yet. By the way,” with a sudden change of tone, “if five is too much, could you manage a sov.?”

“Perhaps I can,” returned Tom, smiling, and thinking he would, by a moderate outlay, purchase immunity from the inroads of Mr. J. D. Trapes. “But I can assure you, my success has by no means reached that height at which five-pound notes become plentiful. However, if a sovereign is of any use,” drawing out his purse, “you are welcome to one.”

“Thank you,” said Trapes, pocketing it. “Will pay back with interest—twenty per cent. ‘pon honour, if I succeed in my grand coup.” He threw on his hat, which, as well as the rest of his attire, was of the seediest,

but still some degrees better than the garments he wore when Tom and Fanny met him at the Waterloo Station ; and with a defiant air was turning to leave Tom's dingy little den, when he suddenly stopped, and exclaimed with an oath, " I nearly forgot ; where does this Ford hang out ? What's his place of business ? "

" That I do not know," said Tom. " And you know City men don't consider it the correct thing to give their private address to any except personal friends."

" Oh, never mind," returned Trapes, with a wave of the hand, intended to express contempt ; " I know a man who was in the same office with him ; he will tell me."

" But, if Ford is not the man who owes you money, what do you want so particularly with him ? "

" If it's not him, he is uncommon like him ! perhaps he is his twin brother, and can give me information," said Trapes, with a grin. " At all events, Master Tom, you may be clever enough to succeed, but you are not clever enough to suck my brains, or find out my little game, I can tell you ; though I dare say you are calling me a drunken vagabond in your own mind. I'd like to hear you say it, sir ! I'd like to hear you say it ! "

With a gloomy and threatening countenance, the wretched man abruptly turned his back upon Tom, and departed, and with a mixture of disgust and regret, Tom resumed the work he had interrupted.

“I wonder if anything could have saved that fellow? the best and the worst of us have turning points; and it’s an awful business if the pointsman is not at hand to keep the train on the right line! But what does he want with Ford? for it is evident Ford is the man he wants. Ford was never on the turf, even in the mildest form. I doubt if he ever went to the Derby.” As no solution offered itself, Tom shook his head, and proceeded in his task of demolishing the arguments in a rival “leader” of that morning; but at intervals the unanswerable question would recur: “What can the fellow want with Ford?”

The night brought triumph! Tom’s piece was received with genuine hearty laughter and applause. The smiling manager promised its repetition, every night till further announcements; and the author bowed his acknowledgments from a private box. But faithful to his word, though wearied by work, excitement, and the laughter of a jovial

supper-party, Tom did not sleep that night till he had written and posted a few joyous, loving lines to Fanny, enclosing a letter, which he found on his table, from Ford; and adding a word of warning for Kate. "I would not reply too quickly were I you, nor mention the date on which I received the enclosed missive; dates might suggest the probable distance of your present locale from the twelve mile radius. Though why you choose to preserve such strict incognito, I don't pretend to judge."

Mr. Ford's letter gave Mrs. Temple some food for thought, it was as follows:—

"**M**Y DEAR MRS. TRAVERS,

"I trust you will not deem me intrusive if I avail myself of your friend Mr. Reed's permission to address a few lines to one whose interest and welfare have ever, since the days of our early friendship, been most dear to me. I feel that, hurried on by an impetuosity which blinded me to the requirements of good taste and sound judgment, I wofully offended you at our last meeting; also that the fact of my having been the innocent instrument of discovering the document which has so fatally injured your fortunes, has

affected your opinion prejudicially against me. I have long wished for an opportunity to remonstrate against your severity, and if possible, win back the confidence you once reposed in me. I acknowledge with much penitence, that the expression of my feelings was premature; that I did not show the delicacy due to your recent widowhood; but, now that time and distance have intervened, is there no hope that a devotion so true, so lasting as mine, dating from those days of simple happiness, when I was a favoured guest of your dear and respected mother, may not at last win some return—may not ultimately meet success? I would not venture to urge my suit upon you were it not that fortune has smiled upon me (however undeserving), more than she has upon your excellent self, and I venture to offer you the comforts of an unpretending, though not, I hope, unrefined home. As regards that most disgraceful will, need I remind you that I hastened to place it in your hands—and myself at your disposal? Your present position is not of *my* making; and that position is an unceasing source of agony; I repeat the word, agony, to me! Young, beautiful, accustomed to a life of luxury and observance, how can

you contend against the difficulties which surround you, and which are, or will be, aggravated by the cruel malice of an envious world. While on this topic, suffer me to point out that the fact of your residence being known only to a young and not over-steady man like Mr. Reed, whose estimate of himself is rather above than below par, is, to say the least, liable to misconstruction.

“I think it right to mention that in one of my interviews with Sir Hugh Galbraith, he questioned me as to your surroundings and associations with a brutal directness, which almost urged me, contrary to my habits, to personal violence. He then, with a sneer, observed that he was told your only confident was a good-looking young vagabond connected with the press. I feel, therefore, justified in recommending that you should reveal your abode either to myself as an old and trusted acquaintance of your late husband, or to Mr. Wall, a very respectable and trustworthy person.

“Would I dare hope for permission to visit you and urge my cause! When I remember the happy evenings in which I was permitted to share your graceful task of tending your

favourite flowers, I feel the bitterest regret at the unaccountable estrangement which has occurred. Then I flattered myself that a strong sympathy existed between us, and that you were not unconscious nor quite averse to my unspoken admiration ! How my hopes and your happiness were blighted by untoward circumstances, it is not for me to recapitulate. It is, though no doubt for different reasons, engraven on both our hearts !

“ Again, entreating your pardon and favourable consideration,

“ I am, dear Mrs. Travers, as ever,
devotedly yours,
“ JAMES W. FORD.

“ P.S.—Pray excuse all errors in this hurried scrawl.”

It had cost him a night’s rest to polish and elaborate !

The effect of this epistle on the young widow can only be described by a line in Fanny’s reply to Tom Reed :

“ Whatever was in Mr. Ford’s letter, it has set Kate dancing mad !”



CHAPTER IV.

T would not be easy to disentangle and define the mixed feelings which brought the bright colour to Kate Travers's cheek, and made her heart beat indignantly as she perused the foregoing effusion. She scarcely herself knew why Mr. Ford's pretensions were so peculiarly offensive, nor did she take the trouble of inquiring, but had that devoted friend been within reach he would have received a crushing rejoinder. The passage about Sir Hugh Galbraith annoyed and yet amused her. She had now grown tolerably familiar with his modes of thought and expression, and she could well picture the quiet profound scorn with which he had spoken

of herself "and the good-looking young vagabond connected with the press."

If there was one point upon which Kate Travers was more specially sensitive than another, it was on the respect she thought she deserved. Naturally of a sunny disposition and easy temper, loving pleasure, and luxury, and beauty with a certain amount of graceful indolence, which in prosperous times entirely masked the strong will and untiring energy stored up against the day of need, she never dreamed any one would suspect her of the fleshly weaknesses to which others were liable ; she knew the childlike purity of her own life, and suspected that the long winter of such chilling circumstances as hers had been, might have had a hardening influence on her nature ; but she shrank from a disrespectful word as from a blow, and had her knowledge of men been equal to her knowledge of books, she would no doubt have resisted the temptation to play with the grave surprised admiration evinced by Galbraith lest it might lead to unpleasant results.

Now she could not draw back without a display of stiffness and a change of tone which might lead to awkward explanations, and as her enemy progressed towards complete re-

covery, she told herself that it did not matter, he would soon be gone, and not remember much about the adventure until she re-opened the will case and defeated him. Then, indeed, their present acquaintance might lead to his accepting some portion of the property he had so long considered his inheritance, for after the friendly intercourse they had held, she never could contemplate robbing him of everything.

These thoughts flitted through her brain in and out of her daily routine of answering inquiries and matching colours, finding patterns and making out bills. It had been a busy and a profitable day, but although the lengthening evenings tempted many to keep their shops open later, the shutters of the Berlin Bazaar were always up at seven. The sweet repose of the after-hours was too precious to be curtailed even for the chance of a trifle more profit. On this particular evening—the one following her first perusal of Ford's letter—Mrs. Temple was considerably bored by a summons from Dr. Slade to speak to him in the best sitting-room, as tea was being laid in the shop parlour.

“ Well, Mrs. Temple, I suspect you will soon lose your tenant, and I dare say you will

not regret him," cried the Doctor, who looked rather displeased as he stood by the window in the waning light, his head erect, his very shirt frill bristling with indignation. "A more quietly insolent personage I have never met. He has just told me I was a gossip!—me!—merely because I made a harmless jest. He is evidently an ill-tempered, crotchety fellow, and must be a great nuisance to his sisters—the Hon. Mrs. Harcourt and Lady Lorrimer—to whom I have written on his behalf. Nothing can be more charming than the letters I have from them, fully recognizing my care and attention, especially Mrs. Harcourt, who wanted to come and nurse him, only he forbade it in terms I should be sorry she heard. I have given him a great deal of time over and above professional attendance, and written, as I said, to his sisters and a cousin of his for him, and now here pays my well-meant attempts to amuse him by telling me I am a gossip!"

"Very rude indeed, Doctor," said Mrs. Temple sympathisingly.

"However," he resumed, "I only wanted to tell you that he has been asking me when he will be fit to go to London, and I really cannot advise his leaving for another week.

He has still symptoms about the head which indicate that he requires perfect rest—freedom from excitement—and London would just be the worst place for him. No medical man likes to see a case he has treated successfully going out of his hands, but I suspect if he chooses to go, nothing will stop him."

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Temple.

"I thought it right to warn you, as you might like to make some other arrangement; and I hope the letting of your rooms has been a help, a——"

"A decided help, and I am very much obliged to you," returned Mrs. Temple, pleasantly.

"That's all right. Now you must not keep me talking here when I have twenty places to go to. Do you know, I met that young schemer Bryant walking with one of Miss Monitor's girls three miles off, on the Barmouth Road, near Jones's, the curate of Drystones. You know Jones? Well, near his house. I believe Jones's wife is Bryant's sister. It did not look well at all. I wouldn't trust Bryant farther than I could throw him. Good evening, Mrs. Temple; good evening."

Kate politely attended him to the door, and as she turned to join Fanny, was seized upon

by Mrs. Mills, who carried her into the kitchen to speak to Sarah's mother. She was in great tribulation, being afflicted with a wild son, who turned up every now and then to work mischief. On the present occasion he had got hold of the poor woman's little hoard, had absconded, and left her penniless just as the week's rent was due. She had, therefore, made so bold as to come and ask if Mrs. Temple would be so kind as to advance a little of Sarah's money. This, in the mouth of Sarah's mother, was a very long tale. But Kate listened with the gentlest untiring sympathy, for hers was a very tender heart, and a full half-hour and more was occupied in giving help and comfort.

When at last she returned to the parlour she was not surprised to find the lamp lighted and Fanny seated behind the "cosy"-covered teapot; but she was surprised to find Sir Hugh Galbraith seated opposite to her, apparently quite at home, leaning easily across the table as he talked pleasantly with the pretty tea-maker. Kate could not help being struck by the altered expression of his face since she had first beheld it.

It was softer, brighter, younger-looking, but while she paused, still holding the handle

of the door, Sir Hugh rose quickly and came a step towards her. "I have ventured to ask admittance, although I have no letters to write, or rather to have written for me, and Miss Lee, as commanding in your absence, has graciously assented," he said.

"Pray sit down," replied Mrs. Temple, moving to the place Fanny vacated for her. She was startled and disturbed at finding him there: but he was going away next week; it was really of no moment, this unexpected visit. Still Ford's letter and her own previous reflections ruffled her composure. She coloured and grew pale, and felt Galbraith's eyes fixed upon her, though she did not look up to see them.

"You are not well, or something," he exclaimed. "I had better go away."

"No, Sir Hugh. I am happy to see you," a little stiffly. "But the light affects me after the dusky kitchen, where I have been listening to a tale of woe. Fanny dear, will you bring the shade?" Thus, effectually sheltered from observation, Kate quickly recovered herself and dispensed the tea, stretching out a hand white and delicate enough for a lady of high degree, as Galbraith observed, when she offered him a cup, which Fanny

followed with a delightful slice of brown bread and butter.

“A tale of woe!” exclaimed that young lady; “and in the kitchen? What took Dr. Slade there?”

Mrs. Temple briefly explained.

“I could not think what kept you, and Sir Hugh said he was sure the Doctor was gone.”

“Old humbug,” observed Galbraith. “I thought he would never go. I had to tell him some unpleasant truths before he would stir.”

“Did you?” asked Fanny, who, in consequence of Tom’s note, was in towering spirits.

“What did he say?”

“I know,” said Mrs. Temple, slyly. “For he has been making his complaint.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Galbraith, looking under the shade to get a glimpse of her smile.

“What did he say?”

“That you are an ungrateful man; that he has devoted himself to your service, and that your return is to tell him he is a gossip.”

Galbraith smiled rather grimly. “Did he tell you what led up to it?” he asked.

“No; he did not give the context.”

"He is not a bad sort of fellow," resumed Sir Hugh, "only spoiled by a country-town life and associating with women—I mean old women."

"And pray why should women, young or old, spoil him?" cried Fanny aggressively. "I am sure we are much better than men in many ways."

"I think you are," returned Galbraith, gravely; "still I don't think men or women the better for associating exclusively with each other. Military women, for instance, are not pleasant. Have you ever met any?" addressing Mrs. Temple.

"No," said she, answering the real drift of the question; "I have never, of course, been in that sort of society, and have never reckoned any military ladies among my customers."

Galbraith was silent until Mrs. Temple asked him if he would have any more tea. "If you please. I assure you no old woman likes tea better than I do. I have always found it the best drink when hard worked in India," he returned with a smile. "Some fellows have a great craving for beer, and I confess it is very tempting in a warm climate."

"And are you strong enough to resist temp-

tation ?" asked Kate, carelessly, as she again held out her fair hand with his cup in her long taper fingers.

"As far as eating and drinking go, yes ; but I suppose all men have their assailable point."

"Pray, what is yours ?" asked Fanny, who, in her present state of spirits, was irrepressible.

"I really cannot tell."

"And I am sure, if you could, you are not bound to answer a decidedly impertinent question," said Mrs. Temple. "Fanny, you are rather too audacious."

"I knew you would scold me !" exclaimed Fanny ; "but I could not help it."

Galbraith laughed. "Suppose you set me the example of confession, Miss Lee. What is your weak point ?"

"I could not possibly tell, like you ; but for a different reason : all my points are weak ; the puzzle is, which is the weakest."

"Then I suspect your friend has enough to do to keep you in order ; irregular troops are generally mutinous."

"I am the meekest creature in creation," cried Fanny. "The moment K——, Mrs. Temple, I mean, even looks as if she was going

to find fault with me I am ready to confess my sins and go down."

"Only to rise up again the next instant not one bit the better for your penitence," said Mrs. Temple, walking over to the bell to ring for Mills.

"That is exactly like irregular cavalry. They disperse the moment you charge them, and immediately gather on your flanks and harass your march," remarked Galbraith.

"I cannot say Fanny has harassed my march," replied Mrs. Temple, smiling kindly at that delinquent as she placed the cups and saucers and plates neatly on the tray to save Mills trouble. "But I suppose it would be easier to keep a regiment of superior men—I mean educated men—in order, than the waifs and strays you pick up."

"I assure you soldiers are not on the whole bad fellows; but as to educated men, I can't say I should like to command a regiment of straw-splitting, psalm-singing troopers who would probably dispute every order they didn't fancy."

"But you, you are an educated gentleman, and don't you think," rejoined Mrs. Temple, "that if you had undertaken certain work and certain service you would be more obedient,

more dutifully subordinate, than a poor, ignorant, half-blind creature who cannot see an inch beyond the narrow bounds of his own personal wants and pleasures, while *you* could grasp an idea of the general good ?”

“ There is, of course, some truth in your view,” said Galbraith, somewhat surprised ; “ but a regiment of gentlemen, in the first place, is out of the question. There have been, I grant, body-guards of kings who were all gentlemen, but from what we know of them they were not exactly models of sound discipline or serious behaviour.”

And in the heat of argument Sir Hugh rose, drew his chair near his antagonist, and clear of the obstacle presented to his vision by the lamp-shade.

“ There is your work,” interrupted Fanny ; “ you know you promised that should be ready to-morrow :” “ *that* ” was a banner-screen of beads and silk, and each section of the pattern was to be begun, in order to save the fair purchaser from too severe exercise of brain.

“ Thank you, Fan,” and Mrs. Temple proceeded quickly and diligently to thread needles and sew on beads, glancing every now and then with eyes that sparkled and

deepened, and laughed and grew dim with a slight suffusion if she was very earnest. Fanny placed a large work-basket before her as she took her seat opposite their guest, who felt wonderfully interested and at home.

"Oh! the people you mean would not be called gentlemen now; they were only polished barbarians, incapable of self-control; any tolerably educated shopboy would conduct himself better than the 'de's' and 'vons' of those days," said Kate.

"By Jove! men were better bred, more high bred, then. I never heard that doubted before," cried Galbraith.

"High bred! that is, they took off their hats and bowed more gracefully, and treated their inferiors with insolence none the less brutal because it had a certain steely glitter, and they were more ferocious about their honour; but they were mere dangerous, mischievous, unmanageable children compared to what men *ought* to be."

"You are a formidable opponent, Mrs. Temple. Still I will not renounce my ancestors; they were gallant fellows, if they had a dash of brutality here and there. And you will grant that without a regard for honour they would have been still more brutal."

"I do ; nor do I by any means undervalue the good that was in them, only it seems so stupid either to want to go back to them, or to stand still."

"And what good does progress do ? It only makes the lower classes dissatisfied and restless, and wanting to be as well off as their betters. There is nothing they don't aim at."

"Oh, Sir Hugh Galbraith! you have concentrated the whole essence of liberalism in those words. That is exactly what progress does ; it makes people strive to be better. I have no doubt the first of our British ancestors (if they were our ancestors) who suggested making garments instead of dyeing the human skin was looked upon by the orthodox Druids as a dangerous innovator."

"That has been said too often to be worthy of such an original thinker as you are," returned Galbraith, leaning forward and taking up some of the bright-coloured silks which lay between them.

"It cannot be said too often," observed Mrs. Temple stoutly, "for it contains the whole gist of the matter. I will trouble you for that skein of blue silk. Thank you." Their hands touched for a moment, and Galbraith felt an unreasonable, but decided, in-

clination to hold hers just to keep her eyes and attention from being too much taken up with that confounded stitchery.

“But,” he resumed, “you cannot suppose men born to a certain position like to feel those of a lower sphere intruding upon them, and treading on their heels?”

“Step out, then! Put a pace between you and them, and keep the wonderful start ahead that circumstance has given you,” she returned, with great animation.

“You are too ferocious a democrat,” said Galbraith, laughing; “and to look at you, who could believe you had ever been, even for a day, behind a counter? There!” he exclaimed, “I am the clumsiest fellow alive. I have made a horribly rude speech.”

“I quite absolve you,” said Mrs. Temple, frankly, and looking at him with a sweet half smile. “A counter has not hitherto been the best training school to form a gentlewoman; but the days are rapidly passing when women could afford to be merely graceful ornaments. We must in the future take a share of the burden and heat of the day. God grant us still something of charm and grace! It would be hard lines for us both if *you* could not love us.”

"Not love you!" repeated Galbraith almost unconsciously; he had hitherto been thinking the young widow rather too strong-minded—a description of character he utterly abhorred. "I imagine your ideal woman will seldom be realised, unless, indeed, in yourself."

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Fanny, "I have run the needle into my finger, and it is so painful."

Due commiseration being expressed, Fanny said she must put it in warm water, and darted away.

"Do not imagine I am such a narrow idiot," said Galbraith, drawing his chair a trifle closer, "as not to respect a man who fights his way up to fortune from a humble origin, but then, he ought always to remember the origin."

"Yes; you of the 'upper ten,'" said Mrs. Temple, smiling, while she hunted with her needle an erratic white bead round an inverted box cover, "are decently inclined to recognise the merits of such a man *when* he has achieved success in the end, but you do your best to knock him on the head at the beginning."

"How do you mean?"

"By creating difficulties of all sorts. Mountains of barriers for him to climb over:

barriers of ignorance—it is unwise to educate the masses ; barriers of caste—none but gentlemen must officer army or navy ; barriers of opinion ; social barriers—Oh, I talk too much ! and I am sure so do you. Dr. Slade told me just now you were to be kept as quiet as possible and undisturbed ; and here am I contradicting you most virulently. Do go away and read a sermon or something, or you will never be able to go to London next week.”

“ Next week ! Does that confounded old humbug say I am to go away next week ? I intend nothing of the kind.”

“ He said you wished to leave for town ; so I warn you to give me due and proper notice, or I shall charge accordingly.”

Mrs. Temple glanced up as she spoke, to see the effect of her words ; but no answering smile was on his lip. He looked grave and stern, and was pulling his moustaches as if in deep thought. There was a moment’s silence, and then Galbraith exclaimed, in his harshest tones, with an injured accent, “ You never let one forget the shop.”

“ It was the lodgings this time,” said Mrs. Temple demurely. “ I did not suppose you would mind.”

"Do you want me to go away?" asked Sir Hugh. "I can go to-morrow if you do."

"I am very glad you feel so much better. Pray suit yourself. I could not be in a hurry to part with so good a tenant."

Galbraith muttered something indistinct and deep. There was a few moments' silence, and then Sir Hugh said gravely, "I am quite aware what a nuisance an invalid inmate must be; and I hope you believe I am grateful for all the care you have bestowed upon me."

"Indeed, I do not. I have not bestowed any care upon you; Mills has, a little, and your servant a good deal."

"The fact is," returned Galbraith, with a tinge of bitterness, "I have never had much care in my life, and I am, therefore, especially grateful when I find any, or fancy I have any."

"Grateful people deserve to be cared for," said Kate, laying her pattern on the table and gravely regarding it.

"And you have been very good to write my letters," continued Galbraith. "I never knew the luxury of a private secretary before, and as I believe 'the appetite grows with what it feeds upon,' I shall miss your assistance greatly. I never found my correspond-

ence so easy as since you were good enough to write for me."

"A private secretary would not be a serious addition to your suite," returned Mrs. Temple, without looking up. "There are many intelligent, well-educated young men would be glad of such an appointment."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Galbraith. "I never thought of a man secretary."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Temple.

"No; men are so unsympathetic and slow to comprehend."

"I always thought so," replied Mrs. Temple frankly; "but I didn't think a man would."

Sir Hugh's face cleared up as he looked at her, and laughed. "We are agreed then," he said; "and I don't think you put a much higher value on Slade than I do."

"I do not know what your value is; I like him, because he has always been a friend to me from the first."

"And that is how long?" asked Galbraith, shrewdly.

"Oh! if you want gossip you must apply to himself."

"I shall never put a question to him, you may be sure," said Galbraith gravely. "But I confess I should like to know how it happens

that you are keeping a shop here? Nothing will ever persuade me that you are ‘to the manner born.’”

“ You are mistaken, Sir Hugh Galbraith”—he always fancied there was an echo of defiance in the way she pronounced his name—“ my grandfather and great-grandfather, nay, so far as I know, all my ancestors—if such a phrase may be permitted—were knights of the counter. The best I can hope” (with a smile indescribably sweet and arch) “ is that they never gave short measure.”

“ It’s incredible!” said Galbraith solemnly.

“ Nevertheless true,” she continued. “ Don’t allow your imagination to create a romance for my pretty partner and myself, though we are weird women, and keep a Berlin bazaar.”

As she spoke Fanny entered. “ It is all right now,” she said. “ Sir Hugh, if you ever run a needle into your finger, plunge it into hot water immediately, and you will find instantaneous relief.”

“ I shall make a note of it,” replied Galbraith; “ and in the meantime must say good-night.”

“ How fortunate you are,” cried Fanny. “ You are going to London next week and will go to the theatre, I suppose?”

"I scarcely ever go to the theatre," said Galbraith, "but I imagine most young ladies like it."

"I would give a great deal to see 'Reckoning with the Hostess,'" cried Fanny, unable to restrain herself.

"Suppose we all meet at Charing Cross, and go together," exclaimed Galbraith, who felt convalescent and lively.

"It would be perfectly delightful," said the volatile Fanny, while Kate, who felt keenly the absurdity of the proposition, hid her face in her hands while she laughed heartily.

"I must say good-night," repeated Sir Hugh, bowing formally.

"I trust you will not be the worse for our argument," said Mrs. Temple, rising courteously.

"I am not sure," he replied. "I shall tell you to-morrow."

"Well, Kate," cried Fanny when he was gone, "has he proposed? I really thought he was on the verge of it when I ran the needle in my finger. It would be such fun."

"Fanny, you are absolutely maddening! What can put such nonsense into your head? To tell you the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, I have permitted Sir Hugh Gal-

braith the honour of our acquaintance, simply because I wish him to feel, however appearances may be against me, that his cousin married a gentlewoman; for he will yet know who I am."

"That sounds very grand and mysterious, Kate. I wish you could contrive to make him give you a proper allowance out of the estate—Well, there; I did not mean to make you look like a sibyl and a fury all in one!"

"I am both indignant and disgusted, Fanny, because there is so much levity and vulgarity in what you say," cried Mrs. Temple warmly. "But we have something else to think of; read this"—and she drew forth Ford's letter, doubling it down at the passage adverting to herself as having for sole confidant "a good-looking young vagabond connected with the press."

"I suppose," cried Fanny, "that stupid, conceited old duffer means Tom."

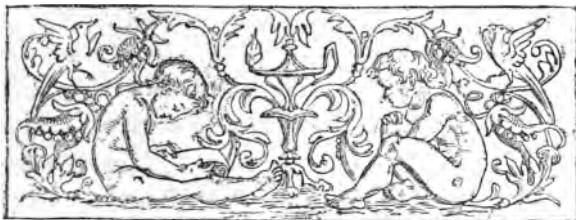
"I suppose so; but pray remember it is Hugh Galbraith who is represented as speaking. Now you say Tom is coming down on Saturday; it is most important he should not meet our tenant. I imagine Sir Hugh knows his name."

“ Oh yes, very likely ; but Sir Hugh has never intruded on us on a Saturday, and we must try to keep them apart. How delightful it will be to see Tom—and this is Thursday !”

“ Yes ; I shall be very glad to have a talk with him. Have you written to him ?”

“ To be sure I have.”

No more was said ; and Mrs. Temple pondered long and deeply before she was successful in composing herself to sleep. What was she doing ? was she acting fairly and honestly ? was she quite safe in trusting to the spirit, half-defiant, half-mischievous, which seemed to have taken possession of her ? Well, at any rate it could do no harm. In a few days Hugh Galbraith would be removed out of the sphere of her influence, and nothing would remain of their transient acquaintance save the lesson she was so ambitious of teaching him, viz., that whatever her circumstances were, she was a gentlewoman, and that some excuse existed for Mr. Travers’s weakness in making her his wife.



CHAPTER V.

GUGH GALBRAITH was a very English Englishman. In opinion, as in battle, he was inclined, even when beaten by all the rules of combat, to resist to death. His prejudices would have been rigid to absurdity but for a thin, nevertheless distinct, vein of common sense which streaked the trap rock of his nature ; while here and there, carefully hidden, as he thought, from all observers, and scarcely acknowledged to himself, were sundry softer places—“faults,” as with unconscious technicality he would have termed them—which sometimes troubled him with doubts and hesitations a consistently hard man would

never have known. A vague, instinctive sense of justice—another national characteristic—saved him from being a very selfish man, but did not hinder him from an eager seeking of his own ends, so long as they did not visibly trench on the rights of others; and at times, when the upper and harder strata of his character was, by some artesian process, pierced through, capable of giving out more of sympathy than his kinsfolk and acquaintance in general would believe. But he possessed very little of the adaptability, the quickness of feeling and perception, which gives the power of putting oneself in another's place; and, therefore, possessing no gauge by which to measure the force of other men's temptations, he had, by a process of unreasoning mental action, accumulated a rather contemptuous estimate of the world in general. Men were generally weak and untrue—not false, habit and opinion prevented that—and women he scarcely considered at all; the few specimens he had known intimately were not calculated to impress him favourably. His sisters, accustomed to the amenities of foreign life, never disguised their opinion that he was a hopeless barbarian, until, indeed, their last few interviews, when they showed a disposi-

tion to treat his *brusquerie* as the eccentricity of a noble sincerity. The younger sister, who had always clung to him, and whom he had loved with all the strength of his slow-developing boyish heart, had chilled him with an unspeakable disgust by bestowing herself on an artist, a creature considered by Galbraith in those days, and, with some slight modification, still considered, as a sort of menial—as belonging to a class of upper servants who fiddled and painted and danced and sang for the amusement of an idle aristocracy. He would have been more inclined to associate with the village blacksmith, who, at any rate, did real man's work when he forged horseshoes and ploughshares by the strength of his right arm. In short, he was a mediæval man, rather out of place in the nineteenth century.

In politics a Tory, yet not an ignoble one. He would have severely punished the oppressor of the poor. Indeed, he thought it the sacred duty of lords to protect their vassals, even from themselves ; but it must be altogether a paternal proceeding, given free gratis out of the plenitude of his nobility. Of the grander generosity to our poorer brethren that says, “Take your share of God's world, it is yours ; we owe each other nothing, save

mutual help and love," he knew nothing ; he had never learned even the alphabet of true liberality ; and his was a slow though strong intellect, very slow to assimilate a new idea, and by no means ready to range those he already possessed in the battle array of argument.

Nevertheless, he was very little moved by his charming landlady's opinions ; they were a pretty woman's vagaries, prettily expressed ; still, as he thought over every word and look of hers that night while smoking the pipe of peace and meditation before he went to rest, he felt more and more desirous of solving the mystery of her surroundings. That she and her friend were gentlewomen he never for a moment doubted, driven by poverty to keep a shop, though it was an unusual resource for decayed gentility. For poor gentry Galbraith had special sympathy, and had a dim idea that it would be well to tax successful money-grubbers who would persist in lowering the tone of society in general and regiments in particular by thrusting themselves and their luxurious snobbish sons into those sacred ranks—he had, we say, a dim idea that such members of the community ought to be taxed in order to support the helpless descendants

of those who had not the ability to keep their estates together. Still, how any woman with the instinct of a gentlewoman could bring herself to keep a shop, to measure out things to insolent customers, perhaps to old market-women, and stretch out that soft white hand to take their greasy pence, he could not conceive. She ought to have adopted some other line of work ; yet if she had he would not have known her ; and though he put aside the idea, he felt that he would rather have missed far more important things. She was different from all other women he had ever known ; the quiet simplicity of her manners was so restful ; the controlled animation that would sparkle up to the surface frequently, and gave so much beauty to her mobile face—her smile, sometimes arch, often scornful, occasionally tender ; the proud turn of her snowy throat ; the outlines of her rounded, pliant figure ; the great, earnest, liquid eyes uplifted so frankly and calmly to meet his own—Galbraith summoned each and every charm of face and form and bearing that had so roused his wonder and admiration to pass in review order before his mind's eye, and “ behold, they were very good.” It was the recollection of their first interview, however,

more than a month back, that puzzled him most. “She must have fancied she knew something of me”—he thought, as he slowly paced his sitting-room, restless with the strange new interest and fresh vivid life that stirred his blood, and in some mysterious way, of which he was but half conscious, deepened and brightened the colouring of every object, until Fanny declared, as she bid Kate good-night, that “Sir Hugh must have a bad conscience to keep tramping up and down like that”—“and something to my discredit,” he mused. “I shall not soon forget the first look I had from those eyes of hers ! It was equivalent to the ‘Draw and defend yourself, villain !’ of old novels. How could I have offended her; or any one belonging to her ? I’ll ask her some day—some day ! By Jove, I can’t stay here much longer ! Yet why should I not ? I have nothing to take me anywhere. This accident has knocked my visit to Allerton on the head. The Countess and Lady Elizabeth will be in town by the time I am fit to go anywhere. That pretty little girl, Miss Lee, is not unlike Lady Elizabeth, only she has more ‘go’ in her—but Mrs. Temple !” even in thought Galbraith had no words to express the

measureless distance between his landlady and the Countess of G——'s graceful, well-trained daughter. The truth is, Galbraith had, after his accession of fortune, seriously contemplated matrimony. He had no idea of being succeeded by a nephew of a different name, or a cousin whom he disliked. Moreover, it behoved him to found the family anew—to impose a fresh entail—especially if he could buy back some of the old estates; and Payne had written to him that it was probable a slice of the Kirby Grange estates might before long be in the market. If he married, he would go in for family; he did not care so much for rank. Accident had sent him down to dinner at his sister's house with Lady Elizabeth, who seemed a pretty, inoffensive, well-bred girl; and he even began, by deliberate trying, to take some interest in her, after meeting at several parties by day and by night, where he had, rather to Lady Lorrimer's surprise, consented to appear. Lady Elizabeth, although her father was not a wealthy peer, had a few thousands, which would not be unacceptable; and, though Galbraith had bid her good-bye in Germany, where they had again encountered, with his ordinary cool, undemonstrative manner, he

had made up his mind to accept the invitation then given him, if duly repeated, to go to Allerton, the family seat, for the close of the hunting season ; and should Lady Elizabeth stand the test of ten days or a fortnight in the same house, he would try his luck. A wish to enjoy his friend Upton's society to the last of his stay induced Galbraith to postpone his visit for a week ; and then he met with the accident which made him Mrs. Temple's inmate ; and, lo ! all things had become new. Whatever his lot might be, it was impossible he could marry a pretty doll like Lady Elizabeth—a nice creature, without one idea different from every other girl, without a word of conversation beyond an echo of what was said to her. No ; he wanted something more companionable than that ; something soft and varied enough to draw out what tenderness was in him ; something brave, and frank, and thoughtful—to be a pleasant comrade in the dull places of life. At this point in his reflections, Galbraith pulled himself up, with a sneer at the idea of his dreaming dreams, waking dreams, at that time of his life. “I'll just stay a week longer,” he thought, “I really am not quite strong yet, and then I will go to town ; by that time I

shall manage to penetrate that puzzling woman's mystery, or I shall give it up. I shall have Upton or Gertrude coming down here to see what keeps me in such quarters, and, by Jove ! I would rather neither of them did. *She* would make mischief with or without grounds." So saying, almost aloud, Galbraith lit his candle, and turned down the lamp.

On Saturday morning, after due consultation with Fanny, Mrs. Temple wrote a little note to Sir Hugh, presenting her compliments, and begging to say they expected their agent from London that evening, and would be engaged on business, but if Sir Hugh Galbraith wished any letters written, Mrs. Temple or Miss Lee would be happy to do so between two and five.

"There," said Mrs. Temple, as she wrote these lines rapidly in pencil, "that ought to keep him out of the way."

"Yes, it ought, and will. Poor fellow ! how moped he must be all Sunday, and, indeed, every day, by himself."

"Well, he need not stay if he does not like. I am sure he is quite strong enough to travel. He was out driving for three hours yesterday."

"Oh, it is the quiet Dr. Slade recommends. Oh, Kate! how I wish he would lend us his dog-cart to take a drive with Tom to-morrow! I am sure he would if I asked him—may I? —it really ought to be yours, you know."

"Oh, Fanny! you do not know what you are talking about, you are so delighted at the idea of Tom being here this evening."

"Of course I shall be glad to see him, but if you think I am out of my mind with joy you are quite mistaken. I feel as calm and collected as possible."

Which calmness was manifested by the most erratic conduct throughout the day—total forgetfulness on various matters, and frequent rushings to and fro between the shop and the kitchen, just to see that Mills did not forget this or that ingredient in her preparation of one or two niceties devised by Fanny herself, who had a delicate taste for the finer branches of cooking.

Saturday being market day, the morning was always a busy time at the Berlin Bazaar; but the rush of customers was generally over about three, as most of the Saturday visitors had a long way to go home; and, on Fanny's return from one of her excursions, she found only two old ladies of the better class of farmers,

one requiring a pair of gloves for her daughter, the other worsted yarn, wherewith to knit her husband's stockings—simple needs, which yet took an unconscionable time to satisfy.

At last they were gone. “I feel quite tired,” said Mrs. Temple, sitting down. “I wish, Fanny, *you* would go up and write for Sir Hugh Galbraith. He sent word that he was sorry to trouble me, but if I could write a few lines for him before five o'clock, he would be greatly obliged; you had better go, dear, for you are no particular use here.”

“And I am sure I should make a fearful confusion of Sir Hugh's letter! Indeed, I cannot go, Kate! I feel quite dazed to-day.”

“Oh, I thought you were peculiarly cool and collected! No matter! mistakes in Sir Hugh's letters are not so fatal as mistakes in our business. If you will not go he must do without a secretary.”

“Well,” cried Fanny, with sudden resolution, “I will write for him this once. Do you know I am half sorry to be obliged to hate Sir Hugh Galbraith; but don't be afraid! I never allow myself to think well of him for a moment! I have not a doubt he is a deep designing villain, but he doesn't look like it; though there is something intolerably haughty

in the sort of ‘snuff the moon’ air with which he looks over one’s head.”

“Don’t talk such nonsense, Fanny, dear! I wish Sir Hugh would go; he is growing troublesome.”

“Not to me,” returned Fanny, gravely shaking her head; “he takes no more notice of me than if I was a kitten when *you* are by. I will see how we get on without you to-day.”

“Pray be prudent and steady,” cried Kate, laughing; “though I am sure Sir Hugh is a pattern of propriety.”

Fanny ran away upstairs, dashed hastily into her own room, pinned a blue bow on the side of the pale brown plaits into which her hair was braided, re-arranged her collar, and put on a fresh pair of snowy cuffs; then, with a pleasant approving nod to her own image in the glass, walked away softly and tapped at the drawing-room.

“Come in,” said Galbraith; and Fanny entered in some nervous dread, but, nevertheless, with a firm determination to tease and annoy the enemy so far as in her lay. He was standing near the window, and looking towards the door with an eager, kindled look in his eyes, which altered visibly and unflatteringly.

"Mrs. Temple desired me to say," began Fanny, advancing with evident timidity, "she is sorry not to be able to come as she is very busy, and would you mind having me?"

A smile—a rather kindly smile—brightened Galbraith's face again. "You are very good to come," he said, "I ought to consider myself fortunate in having so charming a little secretary; but I must say your cousin is the better amanuensis of the two."

"He is very impertinent," thought Fanny; "he never would venture to talk like that to Kate. He wants to find out all about her; he sha'n't!—So I told Mrs. Temple," she said aloud, "and that I was more stupid than usual; but she said it was better to make mistakes in your letters than her business," concluded Fanny, looking up in his face with an innocent smile.

"The deuce she did!" exclaimed Galbraith, looking grim for a moment, and then laughing. "I am much obliged to her; possibly she is right! Did she tell you to say this?"

"Oh, no! and pray, Sir Hugh, don't tell."

"I never was a tell-tale. Come, I will not keep you long." And he placed a chair for her at the table, where he had already laid the writing materials in readiness. He was in-

deed bitterly annoyed and disappointed. When Mrs. Temple's note had reached him that morning, he determined not to let all Saturday and Sunday, and probably Monday, pass without having a letter written by his interesting landlady—and not a word with her either ! No, it was the only shadow of amusement or occupation he had, and he was not going to resign it. Of course, if he hadn't been unhinged by that confounded accident, he never would have been driven so hard for one or the other, but it is wonderful how soon a fellow gets used to things, and then there was the oddity and curiosity. So he framed his verbal reply, as he thought, very cunningly, to secure one interview before five o'clock, and now that provoking widow had sent her silly, insignificant little assistant in her place, and cheated him after all. Still he must not confess that he could do without a letter being written very well, and when Fanny was seated, he began rather rapidly, standing opposite to the little, half-frightened, wholly daring scribe, and grasping the back of a chair with his bony, sinewy hand—" My dear Upton,—Thanks for yours of the 30th. I am nearly all right, only not quite able to manage my own correspondence, as you see."

"Stop, stop, stop!" cried Fanny; "who in the world could keep up with you? I am sure you do not run on like that when Mrs. Temple writes for you. I have only got to 'all right,' now; do forgive me, and go on again."

"I beg your pardon," returned Galbraith, smiling, and re-commenced.

"Are there two r's in correspondence?" was Fanny's next query.

"It's not the least matter," he replied. "He will know what you mean."

"What *I* mean," repeated Fanny, still writing. "What *you* mean rather; but it would be better this Mr. Upton thought you were with properly educated people than real shopkeepers."

Galbraith made a mental note of the expression, and grew less anxious to dismiss his secretary.

"Upton must be delighted to have nice legible letters, I imagine—'s double e,'" spelt Fanny, "I have done that."

"I am much obliged for your offer of a visit, but I hope to leave this in a few days; it is a dull hole, with nothing in the shape of sport or occupation, and not a soul to speak to but a gossiping old doctor; I would rather

meet you in town.—At any rate, it would be an infernal bore to have him here!"

Galbraith had dictated the first of the sentences slowly, and then unconsciously spoke out his reflection. "Have you that down?" he asked, after a pause.

"Just finished," said Fanny, with an air of great diligence, and spelling as she wrote "b o r e."

"Why, you haven't written *that*?"

"Yes, of course I have! I thought it was a little uncivil. Oh, dear! I am so sorry! I knew I should be stupid! Pray don't be angry. I will make a nice clean copy if you will tell me the rest."

"Angry! what business have I to be angry? I am under great obligations to you and Mrs. Temple; besides, it was my own fault. Just add, if you please, that I hope to be able to write in a few days myself at greater length, and that will do."

Fanny wrote diligently for a few minutes, and then with an air of profound attention read over the letter, crossing out here and there. "I really feel quite ashamed of myself," she said, taking a fresh sheet of paper. "But Mrs. Temple *would* send me."

To this Galbraith made no immediate reply

—he even moved away to the window, not to draw his secretary's attention from her task—but as soon as it was accomplished, he said as he glanced over the result, “Then it bores Mrs. Temple to write for me ?”

“No, no!” returned Fanny in a tone of palpably polite denial. “She is always very obliging; but to-day she was busy, and anxious to get everything out of the way before our London agent comes—his coming is always an event, you know.”

“Indeed,” said Galbraith, availing himself of her disposition to talk. “Perhaps he is a friend as well as an agent.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Fanny, dotting the “i’s” and crossing the “t’s” of the letter he returned to her to be folded and addressed, and just glancing up at intervals to see the effect of her words ; “he is a dear old friend of Mrs. Temple’s. She knew him before she was married, and he is so kind.”

“Indeed,” said Sir Hugh, pulling out his moustache and staring away into vacancy ; “indeed ! I suppose he is an old experienced man of business ?”

“Oh, very experienced ! But as to age—well, he is older than I am.”

“Older than you are !” echoed Galbraith.

“Why, you are younger than your sister, or cousin, whichever it is?”

“You mean Mrs. Temple,” said Fanny, avoiding a direct reply as to the relationship. “Yes, she is older than I am; but you know the great firms don’t like elderly travellers.”

“He is a traveller, then?”

Fanny nodded.

Galbraith hesitated: he felt it would not be honourable to cross-examine this little, good-humoured chatterbox; still he longed to have some more talk upon the interesting topic of the “London agent,” for he felt strangely savage at the idea of a confounded commercial traveller—a fellow redolent of bad cigars, audacious with the effrontery acquired by bar and billiard-rooms, vulgarly fine, and hideously ill-dressed, coming into close contact with his queenly landlady—indeed, the notion of any man, high or low, coming into that quiet, simple Eden where he had hitherto been the Adam, was infinitely disgusting and vexatious. Meantime, Miss Fanny watched with supreme satisfaction the dropping of his brows and general clouding over of his countenance; silence had lasted long enough she thought, so she said softly, “You will not mention what I repeated just now? I mean what Mrs. Temple said.”

" You may trust me. Would the consequences be dreadful ? Would she give you a wigging ?"

" No ; but it would vex her, and she has had enough to vex her."

" I feared so. Reverses, and that sort of thing ?"

" Yes ; oh, she has been robbed and plundered in the most shameful manner, and basely treated altogether."

" Did you know the late Temple ?"

" No ; but I have seen him."

" Well," said Galbraith, gallantly resisting his inclination to get the whole truth from Fanny, " I shall have a melancholy evening all alone here. You have been very good to let me come and have a talk with you sometimes ; I imagine you have done more for me than old Slade. However, I must make up my mind to solitude for to-night."

" And to-morrow night," said Fanny, pressing the top of her pen against her lips, as she looked up mischievously.

" You need not warn me off the premises," said Galbraith, with a smile. " I did not intend to intrude to-morrow evening, nor until I am asked."

" Now, there ! I never can do or say any-

thing right !” cried Fanny in pretty despair. “ I only meant to say, that although to-morrow will be Sunday, we must talk of business, because he comes so seldom, and then you might not like Tom, and Tom might not like you !”

“ ‘ Tom ’ might not like me, eh ? So you call your agent Tom.”

“ You would not have me call him Mr.—Jones,” cried Fanny, picking herself up just in time ; and then reflecting, with horror, “ That is a shocking story, I wish I hadn’t said it.”

“ Tom Jones,” repeated Sir Hugh, laughing; “ a dangerous sort of name. No, you are quite right to prefer Tom to Mr. Jones.”

“ I must go away,” exclaimed Fanny. “ I have quite finished the letter. Oh ! I forgot —Dr. Slade left word that he could not call this evening, because Lady Styles has returned, and he is going to dine with her.”

“ Lady Styles !” repeated Galbraith. “ Does she not live at a place called Weston ? I believe she is an aunt, or cousin, or grandmother of Upton’s.”

“ Of this gentleman’s,” said Fanny, holding up the letter. “ Then I am sure you will not be at a loss for society any longer: she will come and see you every day and tell you

everything, and make *you* tell everything. She is fond of K——Mrs. Temple,” remembering the strict injunctions she had received not to breathe the name of Kate; “but she nearly drives her mad with questions.”

“But what would induce her to trouble herself about me?”

“She was here the evening you were brought in like a dead creature—what a fright we had!—and you may be sure she has written to this Mr. Upton to know all about you.”

“This will be a visitation! I am glad you have given me a hint,” returned Galbraith. “And you must go? you couldn’t leave Mrs. Temple and her agent to talk business, and make my tea?”

“Indeed I could not,” said Fanny indignantly.

“Well, good-morning, Miss Lee,” rejoined Galbraith, laughing; “remember, I will not venture downstairs again unless I am asked.”

“And then Mrs. Temple will know I have been committing some stupidity,” cried Fanny, forgetting her dignity. “Do come down to tea on Monday, Sir Hugh!”

“What! even if ‘Tom’ is there?”

"Ah! there is no chance of that," said Fanny, shaking her head.

"If I have any letters to answer I will venture down, then, to ask for assistance," replied Galbraith, smiling, and opening the door for her to pass out. As he did so the sound of a man's voice and some slight commotion rose up from below; while Fanny started, blushed, and brightened all over, like some rippling stream when the sun suddenly shines out from behind a cloud; and, with a hasty "good-morning," went quickly away.

"I suspect 'Tom' is in clover when he comes down here," thought Galbraith, closing the door and resuming his arm-chair and a tough article in the "*Quarterly*." "He can't make love to both of them, and that nice little thing takes no common interest in his coming. Who the deuce can he be? What can they all be? They are more than tradespeople. I wish I could get at their history. Miss Fanny let out they were not real shopkeepers. Pooh! what is it to me? I have no business to pry into Mrs. Temple's affairs; she would pull me up very short if I tried. I will go away next week if I feel strong. The doctor says I must take care of my head, and I shall never be so quiet anywhere as here. I wish

that old woman may break her leg, or her neck, or anything to prevent her coming here to destroy one's comfort," for Galbraith felt it would never do to have his fair landlady's letter-writing and general intercourse with a man of his position known: over and over again he revolved the subject in his mind. The "Quarterly" was thrown to the other end of the room. He could not bear the idea of leaving; and yet go he ought, he must. At last he started up, put on his hat, and walked away to the stables he had taken, to have a chat about the "bonnie beasts" with his servant, a Yorkshireman, and get rid of himself. He had not yet given up his invalid habits of early dinner and a "something" mild and strengthening before he went to bed. Both in going out and returning he heard the sound of merry voices and laughter, pleasant, refined laughter, as he passed the door of the best sitting-room; evidently "Tom" was an acquisition; it was no wonder they did not want him, Hugh Galbraith!

His servant noticed that he was more than usually silent, and very severe about some trifling neglect in the stable.

Even Mills did not get a civil look when she brought him some admirable scolloped

oysters ; but at last the uncomfortable evening was over, Galbraith's last waking thought being interrogative, "Who the deuce is Tom?"



CHAPTER VI.

HE three friends, oblivious of the moody, bored baronet upstairs, talked far into the night. Tom Reed had to give an accurate and detailed account of his play, or rather after-piece;—they had just begun to be called “curtain-lifters” by people who had been to French theatres, and custom was veering round to the habit of having, by some Hibernian process, the after-piece first.

Both Mrs. Temple and Fanny were burning to see the production of Tom’s pen; they had, of course, greedily read all the notices and criticisms which had come in their way, still that was but judging at second-hand, and to see it was the grand desideratum.

"We could in any case only go to town by detachments," said Mrs. Temple; "we could not both be away together, and though I could go up alone very well, it would hardly do for Fanny, unless you have some friend who would take her in, Tom."

"We must manage it somehow!" cried Tom. "It will run a tolerably long time, at any rate, and I will settle some plan. Of course," turning to Kate, "you will have to come up soon to lay in your spring goods—isn't that the term?—and then you can easily pay the 'Lesbian' a visit. I really should like to know your opinion; you are a tolerable critic."

"There!" exclaimed Fanny, with affected indignation; "you don't care a straw what I think! But I can assure you my judgment would be much more original, because I don't stuff my head with other people's notions out of books, like Kate."

"Bravo!" said Tom; "your own opinion pure and simple. To tell you the truth, my darling, I am half afraid of those keen little eyes of yours: they spy out one's failings so unrelentingly!"

"Little eyes, indeed! Mr. Joseph Turner thinks them big enough."

"No doubt he does," said Mrs. Temple, laughing. "But I imagine Fanny has choked him off, for we have seen little or nothing of him for some time; not since Fan supped at the paternal residence."

"I am surprised to hear it," said Tom, gravely. "She is such an arrant flirt, that, in the absence of higher game, she would not mind keeping her hand or eyes in by practising on the nearest haberdasher."

"Another word of that description," exclaimed Fanny, "and I will try my hand, as you say, on Sir Hugh Galbraith! He is sulking upstairs, poor fellow, all alone! and wanted me to stay and make his tea for him. It's not too late to give him his supper."

"You know," said Tom Reed, with a slight change of tone, "I warned you to steer clear of Galbraith when I was down here last. He only knows you as the assistant in a shop, and he will very likely presume upon your supposed inferiority of position. If he had met you at—say at Mrs. Travers's table formerly, would he have ventured to ask you to make his tea? Confound his impudence!"

Fanny clapped her hands with delight at this ebullition, and laughed aloud.

"Do not be ridiculous, dear Tom," cried

Mrs. Temple ; " do you think either Fanny or I would go near Sir Hugh if he was inclined to give himself such airs ? I assure you, no one could behave in a more unobtrusive, unobjectionable manner than he does. The only trouble he gives is caused by his perpetual desire to write abrupt, and it seems to me objectless letters—he certainly has not a talent for composition—and his scarcely concealed curiosity to know who we really are. He openly professes his disbelief in our seeming ; but I hope and think he will go away next week. There is really nothing to keep him."

" And still he stays ! That is odd," remarked Tom, looking at his mischievous *fiancée*.

" It is not me !" cried Fanny, too earnest to be correct ; " so don't think it."

" Do you know it is getting very late ?" said the fair hostess.

" Eleven, by Jupiter !" exclaimed Tom, looking at his watch. " Mrs. Temple," he continued, " is your resolution to go to church to-morrow as fixed as fate ?"

" Why ?"

" Because I want a long *tête-à-tête* consultation with you about my own affairs. Suppose Fanny represents the firm at morning service,

and then she shall direct my steps in the evening to some pleasant glade, where we can discuss the result of the cabinet council?"

"Very well; that will suit me exactly," returned Mrs. Temple. "I, too, want a *tête-à-tête* consultation with you; so Fanny shall be devotional for us all."

"That is very fine," said Fanny, who had blushed becomingly when Tom spoke of consulting Mrs. Temple about his own affairs. "I am to be 'banished, whether I like it or not.'

Good-nights were exchanged, and Tom persuaded his pretty cousin to see that the front door was safely fastened after his exit.

The succeeding Sunday was the first real spring day which had visited Pierstoffe that year. The sky was brightly blue, and the sea, stirred by light airs, soft and balmy as though it were June instead of April, "broke into dimples and laughed in the sun." The tide, which had been full at an early hour, was ebbing gently—Pierstoffe bay was too open to be afflicted by a long reach of bare black sea-weed and sludgy sand when the water was low and the difference of ebb and flow was not great; a soft feathery fringe of wavelets lapped the beach as if they loved it. On

the slip before the Berlin Bazaar the gaily painted pleasure-skiffs were not yet displayed; but the strong brown fishing-boats, battered though still sturdy, were drawn up for their legitimate Sunday rest, and dotted about among them sundry fishermen, in their dark-blue guernsey jackets, with hands deep in their trousers' pockets, and the indescribable lounging movement indicative of respite from toil, smoked pipes of peace and made short interjectionary remarks. The cliffs behind the North Parade lay bathed in the young sunshine, so distinct in its tender radiance from the fierce glare of summer. The grey crags, cushioned here and there with patches of soft green turf draped with long pendant tangles of bramble and tufted with heather, showed wondrously clear, beautified by the magic of light; and Sir Hugh Galbraith, who dearly loved to look upon the face of nature—as dearly as though he could have written reams of verse to express his admiration, perhaps the more deeply because he could say very little about it—finding himself too early even for the active Mrs. Mills, strolled out to taste the delicious breeze, and talk, in exactly the abrupt and unstudied manner that suited them, to the lounging fishermen.

"I'll have a yacht," thought Galbraith, walking slowly away past the empty lodging-houses of the North Parade; "a small one need not cost a fortune. I wonder could I manage to put up in the old place for the summer? I hate London, I don't care for the Continent—the regiment will not be home for another six months; and perhaps, after all, I may leave it and go into Parliament. What the deuce is Payne about, that he has given me no more intelligence of the purchase he hoped to manage? I'll write to him to-morrow; that is if Mrs. Temple can spare the time to write for me. By Jove!" moving the hand that lay in his sling, "I believe I could write myself; but it would be more prudent not to try just yet. This is a pretty spot, but very dull. I suppose I was a good deal shaken by that spill, or I should never be satisfied to stay here so long." At this point his reflections grew less clear. He knew in his heart that he never would have endured a life so different from all he had been accustomed to, had he not found such a fascinating secretary. Nevertheless, he could not stay much longer; even the pleasure of his sojourn was largely intermingled with annoyance, ay, with pain. Interviews with his

landlady were always difficult to contrive, and required an amount of scheming most abhorrent to his straightforward and somewhat domineering disposition. Still, to go away and never see her face again, or look into her eyes and try to understand their varying expression!—Galbraith felt, and for the first time acknowledged to himself, it was a sacrifice for which he hardly had strength. Still it must be done. He was no trifler, nor was she a woman to be trifled with. “I will ask Slade to-morrow if I may go up to town next week,” thought Galbraith, turning sharp round to walk back, and frowning to himself at the mockery of asking the Doctor’s consent. “I shall be all right when I am away. I am past the idiotic period of boyish spoonyism;” which was true, but he forgot that childish disorders are always more dangerous in maturity. Comforting himself with this incomplete generalisation, he strolled on slowly, enjoying the delicious morning air, the contagious joyful spring aspect of everything. As he approached the open, where the main line bifurcated into the Stoneborough Road and North Parade, his attention was attracted by a gentleman who was approaching from the town.

"That's not a Pierstoffian," said Sir Hugh to himself. "Perhaps he is some yachtsman, who has got afloat early; at any rate he has a London tailor, yet it's not a yachting rig."

The object of his remark stopped for a few moments at the slip to look about him, and then turned and walked straight and decidedly to Mrs. Temple's door, which was opened the moment he knocked; and, unless Galbraith's eyes, which were keen and far-sighted, deceived him, by the young widow herself.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the mortified baronet, "by Jove! it's Tom! and he is a gentleman—or looks like one."

Here was an additional shade of mystery to meditate upon during breakfast, to which Galbraith did not do so much justice as he ought after his early stroll, and which he permitted Mills to remove without the brief but emphatic commendation he usually bestowed. In truth, Mills was an irreconcilable, and all the more so because she chose to interpret the genuine satisfaction expressed by Sir Hugh as feeble efforts to conciliate her, which she saw through and despised. Whereas, Galbraith was in some odd way taken by her gruff civility and stiff uncommunicativeness, and, quite unconscious of her carefully-nursed dislike, ranked

her in his own mind as a “first-rate old woman, with no humbug about her.”

“Wasn’t the fish right?” asked Mills, jealous of her reputation.

“Oh, yes ; all right, thank you.”

“They have the same downstairs, and Mr. Tom says it’s as good as anything he ever had at—somewhere in Paris.”

“Oh ! he does ?” burning to ask “Tom’s” name, but disdaining surreptitious information. “It is very good. You can take away the things ; and—oh, nothing—I forgot what I was going to say.”

“Mills is evidently an old family servant, has known her mistress in better times,” pondered Galbraith, “and she too was familiar with Tom, who was no Berlin wool agent, not he !—that was only a blind!” which Galbraith did not like. Mrs. Temple and Miss Lee had every right to keep their affairs to themselves—but false appearances ! that was another matter altogether.”

Here Sir Hugh hailed with pleasure the entry of his servant with the ordinary demand for “orders,” and so disposed of a quarter of an hour.

By that time the church bells began to ring out, and Galbraith, arming himself with the

Field, took his place in the window and watched a few proprietors of the deserted lodging-houses going to church. Presently he heard the entrance door open and shut. He was instantly on the alert, but instead of the two figures he had seen so regularly sally forth on preceding Sabbaths, there was only Fanny, in her pretty Sunday half-mourning attire. She turned as she came to the corner of the house, and kissing her hand with an arch smile to some one, vanished round it.

“So Miss Fanny is sent to church, and Mrs. Temple stays to discuss business *tête-à-tête* with ‘Tom’—a pleasant arrangement for the ‘dear old friend,’ as that little minx called him,” thought Galbraith gloomily, as he resorted to his favourite method of relief when perturbed, a species of quarter-deck walk far from soothing to the dwellers beneath him, while he strove to divert his mind by planning his future movements, with an odd, irritated, injured feeling; for he resolved stoutly to quit the rascally hole where he had been so long yet so willingly imprisoned, next week at the furthest. But somehow no suitable scheme presented itself. The people, the places, the amusements of which he thought were all unutterably distasteful,

absolutely revolting. "At any rate," he said to himself as he seized the paper once more with a desperate determination to occupy his thoughts, "I will go to London in the first place. I will find out something to do with myself there."

In the meantime, Tom Reed and his fair client settled themselves for a long confidential talk as soon as they had seen Fanny off.

"Tell me your affairs first, Tom," said Kate. "I do not fancy they will take so much time as mine."

"Oh, mine is a plain unvarnished tale; but I thought I should like to talk it over with you before I spoke to Fanny."

"I rather fancy I know 'the burden of your song,'" she returned, smiling. "Say on."

"Well, you see," began Reed, drawing his chair closer; "things are looking up with me at last. This little piece of mine has made a hit; I have another bespoke and on the stocks. I have had a private note from poor Pennington, telling me that he does not think he can resume his editorial duties; and I believe I am pretty sure to be his successor. This advance will bring me in a decent income;

and so I begin to think I may venture on matrimony!"

"I thought so," said Mrs. Temple quietly.

"Looking at it coolly and dispassionately," resumed Tom, with sparkling eyes, "I think I may; but, my dear Mrs. Travers, neither Fanny nor I would dream of taking any step, even in a right direction, without due regard to the interest and wishes of so good a friend as yourself. If Fanny leaves you—and she must some day—what will you do?"

"I do not know—I do not know," returned Kate thoughtfully; then looking suddenly at Tom with suspiciously moist eyes, "I dare say it is selfish, but I cannot face the idea of living here without her. She makes home for me; but do not let us think of this. It will be much better and happier for Fanny to be your wife than my assistant; only, dear Tom, make sure that you can afford to marry before you rush into matrimony!"

"You may be sure I will; but listen to me: I want to settle something with you before I open the subject with Fanny. If she leaves you, will you nail your colours to the mast and go on with the Berlin Bazaar? You know the undertaking wears its pleasantest aspect now; but picture to yourself being

shut up with a younger, and therefore more objectionable, Miss Potter—being worse off considerably than if you were utterly alone! You couldn't stand it—I know you could not! You would murder the assistant, and throw yourself into the sea, or be driven to perform some sort of tragedy before three months were over, believe me!"

"It is a dreadful look-out, I acknowledge," said Kate, smiling at Tom's prophetic energy. "Still, I should not like to abandon a tolerably successful undertaking merely to avoid a little personal discomfort—it would be cowardly."

"Not a bit of it," replied her prime counsellor. "It is an undertaking in which you ought never to have embarked. I was always opposed to it. I can see clearly enough that one of its attractions was the home and occupation it offered to Fanny; you have stuck to her like a trump; now join her in her home—in ours. You will get back your money for this concern; it is worth considerably more than you gave for it. You can afford to live till you find some more congenial employment. I will find that for you. If you would only write as you talk, what a lot of pleasant magazine articles you could turn out in a year! Come, give the matter a little serious

thought! London, you know, would be the best place to hunt up the tracks of the true will."

"Tom," cried Kate, holding out her hand to him, "you are a good fellow; but such arrangements seldom answer. Settle your plans with Fanny; tell her it would be a satisfaction to me to see her your wife; but put me out of the question. I may come and live near you. I may adopt some other line of life; but I will not quit my business yet awhile."

"And I know Fan won't listen to any suggestion of leaving you," said Tom, gloomily.

"She may—you do not know. Open the subject, and I will follow it up if you wish," replied Kate. "Now have you quite said your say?"

"Yes, quite; and I am all ears to hear yours."

"First, I want a *vivid voce* description of your interview with Mr. Ford. Your letter was a little hurried, though it was very good of you to write at all in such a whirl."

Tom recapitulated all he could remember of the conversation, and answered many questions. Then, after sitting quite still and

silent for a few minutes, Kate exclaimed quickly,

“And what impression does all this make upon you?”

“Well, no particular impression. He is just the same crotchety, touchy, worthy soul he ever was! The last man in the world to tamper with any document. I know what you are thinking of; but he would not have the pluck—believe me, he would not.”

“Perhaps so,” said she. “However, I will, in the strictest confidence, show you the letter you forwarded from him. Not a word of the contents to Fanny; she could *not* refrain from laughing and talking about it, dear thing!”

“Of course she could not,” returned Tom, as Kate rose, and, unlocking her desk, she drew forth the letter and handed it to him.

Reed read through in silence, except for a few indistinct growls.

“The presumptuous blockhead!” he exclaimed, when he finished. “He seems to have lost his senses! Why, he insinuates that he was almost an accepted lover before old—I mean Mr. Travers, came into the field.”

“Which I am sure it is unnecessary for me

to deny!" cried Kate. "You, too, then, think him audacious? I was not sure if it was a true instinct or an unwarranted assumption on my part. Remember, Tom, I was in a lowly state of life enough when I first knew Mr. Ford."

"Whatever you were, if he were not a conceited ass he would have felt he was not your equal. And then to raise his eyes to his employer's widow—a woman of your stamp! It is the height of presumption!"

"Now, Tom, perhaps you think I am justified in doubting him?"

"Well, no! It is scarcely logical. Why should he try to reduce the woman he loved to penury? Why should he enrich her enemy, and defraud himself? Why——"

"It seems a far-fetched idea," interrupted Mrs. Temple, "and yet I cannot get rid of it. You know the day he brought me that false will—as I shall always consider it; he offered to cancel or destroy it—I forget exactly what he said—but something to that effect. I scarcely noticed at the time, but I have often thought of it since."

"Did he?" said Reed, who was looking through the letter again. "That was queer. What do you suppose was his object?"

“ I can hardly say ; he thought probably my dislike and indignation against Sir Hugh Galbraith might have tempted me to consent ; and then what a hold he would have had upon me !”

“ By George ! I could never believe that proper old boy would be such a villain ! I think, my fair friend, you romance a little— all the better for a literary future.”

“ Do not laugh at me, Tom ; and pray do not lose sight of Ford. My whole soul is as fixed as ever on the hope of clearing myself and my husband’s memory from the foul slander of that abominable will.”

“ I will help you with all my wits !” cried Tom, remembering his creditable acquaintance Trapes and his inquiries. “ But I dare not encourage you to hope. You say this Galbraith is going to leave : I would advise you when he is just going off to make yourself known, and then I’ll take long odds that he will make better offers of a settlement, and you might arrange things comfortably. It need not interfere with another will, should it turn up.”

“ Never offer me such advice again !” cried Mrs. Temple, indignantly. “ It is a positive insult.”

“ I am dumb then,” said Tom, submissively.

After a few moments' thought, he asked, "Do you think Ford ever dabbled in any betting or turfy transactions?"

"I should say not—certainly not. Why do you ask?"

"Because a very queer character was making inquiries about him the other day." And Tom proceeded to describe his conversation with Trapes.

"It is curious," said Kate reflectively, after listening with deep attention to his account; "but I cannot see that this supposed debt of Ford's can affect me in any way, even if true; and I presume your friend has some powers of invention, as you say he was once on the press."

"No doubt. I believe very little he says; but that he wanted to find Ford—or the man he resembled—is a fact, whatever the reason; and, moreover, he knows something of Mr. Travers's people."

"True," returned Kate; and then fell into a fit of thought, from which she roused herself by a sort of effort to ask, "Where is this man Trapes to be found?"

"Oh! I have not an idea; indeed, I had no inclination to keep up the connection."

"I wish we knew."

"Better have nothing to say to him ; he would only persuade you to throw away your money."

Mrs. Temple made no reply ; but again opening her desk, took out a memorandum-book, in which she began to write. "What was the date of your interview ?" she asked. Tom gave it, for as it was identical with the first appearance of his play he knew it well. A few more questions proved she was putting down the substance of Reed's communication.

"May I ask what that is for ?" said he.

"This is my evidence-book," replied Kate, turning over the pages. "I put down here everything, great and small, that strikes me as bearing in any possible way upon my case."

"I protest you are a first-rate solicitor spoiled by your sex ! What suggested such a business-like proceeding, positively unnatural in a woman ?"

"I cannot tell ; dwelling intensely on a topic is something like boring for a well, I imagine. If you only go on long enough and deep enough, you are sure to strike an idea—or a spring ! Then you know poor Mr. Travers was always making notes of ideas and suggestions, and all sorts of things that might by any possibility be useful."

“ Believe me, Mrs. Travers—well, Temple ! I must try and remember it—you have admirable qualities for a writer. The keeper of a diary, if intelligent, is the possessor of a mine.”

“ I trust this will prove one to me ; but—oh ! here is Fanny,” as that young person entered, prayer-book in hand, and announced triumphantly that she had been escorted back from church by Mr. Turner, jun.

“ Have you finished your consultation yet ?” she continued, “ or shall I go out again ? I dare say Mr. Turner is lingering outside, and will not mind keeping me company a little while.”



CHAPTER VII.

SUNDAY was not yet over. It had been a very long day to Sir Hugh Galbraith. Some of it he had disposed of indifferently, by trying how he could drive without the whip-hand, and, accompanied by his groom, had gone nearly over to Stoneborough, and now he had once more taken his post of observation in the window. The day had been beautiful throughout, and the sun had nearly accomplished his daily task, so far as Pierstiffe was concerned. The church bells had not yet rung out. All was quiet—the inhabitants were at tea—and Galbraith's reflections were interrupted by the appearance of Mrs. Mills bearing a tray

with a huge cup, a tiny cream ewer, and a plate of thin brown bread and butter, such as Sir Hugh loved.

"It's a thought early," she said, setting down these good things on a small table beside him. "But maybe you won't mind, because it's the girl's Sunday out; and as my missus is having her tea, I thought I would get it all over before I dressed."

Galbraith nodded a reluctant assent, and Mrs. Mills departed. So everything must give way to Tom—even a good solvent tenant like himself. Tom, he supposed, wanted an evening walk, and he, Sir Hugh, must have his tea forced down his throat an hour too soon. He wondered if Tom was to have a *tête-à-tête* walk as well as a *tête-à-tête* conversation. He would have a look as they went out. If that nice little Fanny was excluded from the walk as well as the talk, he must conclude that Tom—confound him!—was the widow's lover, and poor Fanny was an ill-used girl. For he had never seen startled delight if he had not read it in Fanny's eyes when she heard that fellow's voice the evening before. And a dim sort of feeling rippled over his heart or brain—or whatever thinks—like the momentary crisping of water by a

sudden breeze, that it would be very delightful to see any face brighten thus for him—brighten honestly, naturally, even a plain face ; but how gloriously would such eyes as Mrs. Temple's light up ! Strange, that the grandest, the most striking expression he had ever read in them was defiance, almost detestation, and it always suggested the idea of how they would speak a different and opposite passion. However, the tea was very refreshing after his drive, and the bread and butter not unacceptable. By the time both were finished, Galbraith heard voices beneath, and looking out, beheld the two friends, escorted by Tom, sally forth—Mrs. Temple, as usual, in black, with a white shawl over her arm.

“ The three of them, by Jove ! ” murmured Galbraith to himself. “ I never expected that.”

He watched them to the division of the main street into the high road to Stoneborough and that leading to the North Parade. Here they paused and seemed to talk awhile ; then Fanny and Tom went to the left along the high road, and Mrs. Temple took the more direct line to the right, as if intending to stroll along the Parade.

So far as Galbraith knew her stroll would be limited. He was not aware of any outlet beyond the gravel sweep whereon the dowager barouches and invalid chairs—which in the season moved slowly to and fro along the sea front—turned, and came back again. He watched assiduously for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes; still no sign of the figure he looked for. A genial glow began to replace the dull, irritated, injured sensation which oppressed Galbraith all day. Perhaps she was sitting down with a book! At the thought, he caught up his hat and was off, with long, swift steps, to test the truth of his conjecture.

But the few seats on the Esplanade were all untenanted. No one, save a few of those inveterate loungers, the fishermen, was about. Where had that puzzling landlady of his vanished? Reaching the far end of the Esplanade, where a rough sort of breastwork, formed of pieces of rock, stones, clay, and supporting timbers, had been piled up against the sea, he looked round carefully, and perceived the pathway which Mrs. Temple had discovered about a year before.

She must have followed this track, unless indeed she had gone in to pay a visit to one

of the shuttered, blank-looking, North Parade houses. This was highly improbable ; so Galbraith pressed on rapidly, with eagerness and exhilaration—his pulses beating fast, somewhat to his own surprise.

Meantime Mrs. Temple—as she must be called in this portion of the story—strolled on leisurely, glad to be alone, that she might examine and reason away a certain feeling of depression and distress that had been fretting her spirit since her talk with Tom. She had shared in the cheerful pleasantry of their mid-day dinner; she had played her part of hostess as brightly, as cordially as ever ; but under all there was the unrest—the fear of an unavoidable and painful change.

The silence and beauty around calmed her perturbed thoughts — calmed, but did not cheer. The deeper chords of her nature vibrated to the mute language of sea and sky and rock, and resolute endurance rather than cheerful resignation seemed the key-note to which she would tune her spirit.

She reached the little jetty before described, and, walking to the end, seated herself upon the bench. It was evident that she must not count on Fanny's companionship much longer, and how would it be then ? Could she face

the terrible isolation of the life she had adopted ? Worse than isolation, the company without companionship of an assistant of the ordinary shopwoman type ?

For the first time Kate regretted her choice of an occupation, and with all her liberal tendencies, felt the impassable nature of the gulf fixed between the habits, thoughts, and manners of the class she had quitted and that which she had adopted.

" It will be less and less as education and common sense spread up and down ; but at present it is harder to bear than I expected. Is it quite fair of Tom, when he knew that I undertook this business as much on Fanny's account as my own, to take her from me so soon ? Pooh ! how self blinds one. Of course Fanny is his first consideration, and it is far better for her to be his wife than my assistant. Dear Fan ! I trust in heaven he will be good to her ; but matrimony is a fearful trial, and does not want a third in the house to increase its dangers. No ! come what may, I will not desert the course I have marked for myself until I have either succeeded in upsetting the will or given up all hope, or find the Berlin Bazaar will not pay ; but when Fanny leaves and I am much alone, I will try if I can write, as

Tom suggested. I have plenty of time before me, and I must not allow myself to be a coward; but the loneliness—ah!” Gazing out over the sea, she let her thoughts drift freely, vaguely to the past, its tenderness, its high hopes, its bright anticipations, the long, dutiful suppression of her married existence, her glimpse of life and liberty, her cruel reverse. The soft, solemn loveliness of the evening disposed her to think compassionately even of herself.

The sun had sunk behind the cliffs, but the slowly-fading light was still reflected on the sky opposite. Towards the horizon “the raven down of darkness” was gathering, but above it lighter and lighter shades of grey prevailed up to a pale ashen hue, flecked with rosy cloudlets, varying from ruby to faint opal or mother-of-pearl tints of exquisite delicacy. The sea was still and smooth; the breeze of the morning had died away, and the giant slept,—only the soft lulling lap of tiny ripples against the huge wet black stones which lay round the timbers of the little jetty broke the silence. The very air was full of speechless feeling—soft, quiet, and yet not without the chillness of early spring—a certain cold which seemed an expression of sadness. Kate

opened her shawl, and, wrapping it round her, leaned her clasped hands on the rail which defended her resting-place, while she looked forth with keenest appreciation on sea and sky. "To bear is to conquer our fate," she thought; "rather a heroic quotation *à propos* of a Berlin-wool shop. Ah! how different all things might have been had Mr. Travers not been separated from his cousin. If Hugh Galbraith——"

At this point in her reflections she was almost startled into a scream by a voice beside her. "Good evening, Mrs. Temple."

"I thought this haunt was only known to myself, the coastguard, and the sea-gulls," she replied, turning to face the man she had just thought of, and in her surprise speaking more hurriedly than usual. "How did you find it out?"

"By accident," said Galbraith shortly, but he smiled upon her as he spoke—smiled! Yes; his sombre, stern, and usually inexpressive eyes dwelt upon her smilingly, tenderly. She did not know the effect her natural impulsive address, the quick, flitting blush, the welcoming smile into which she had been startled wrought upon the enemy; but she had never spoken quite like this to him be-

fore, and Galbraith for a moment forgot there was any world beyond the few feet of planking on which they stood, and the stretch of sea and sky before them.

"What a lovely evening!" he said, not finding any more original remark after a short pause, and sitting down beside her. "This is a pretty nook—do you often come here?"

"Not often. I cannot, you know."

"Of course."

"In summer it is always my holiday excursion. In winter I can never manage it, and the path is not very safe in rough weather."

"The cliffs are rather fine along here," resumed Galbraith, "but they are nothing to the cliffs near Kirby Grange. My place, or rather my ruin—it's not much more," for Kate had looked up at him inquiringly. He went on. "Great black beetling cliffs with jagged reefs running out to sea, and lots of sea-birds clanging about. I used to climb the crags to get the nests. I was a tolerable cragsman in those days. I don't think I should like to try it now."

"I do not like the terrific in nature," said Kate, drawing her shawl closer, the rounded, graceful outlines of her supple figure showing through the thin, soft folds. "It makes me

think of despair and defeat, and horrors of that kind."

" Yet I fancy you are very plucky for a woman, Mrs. Temple."

" I cannot tell. I have not been much tried, but certainly peace and rest seem to me the greatest good in life."

There was something weary, almost sad, in her voice, and Galbraith was conscious of a very strong desire to take the little hands which were holding her shawl, in his, and ask if there was anything in the world he could do for her, but he only said, " To a certain extent, but peace soon becomes stagnation."

A pause. Mrs. Temple was not displeased to see Galbraith. It amused her, and gave a lighter tone to her thoughts.

" Have you visited your native place since you have returned from India ?" she asked at last, the silence growing awkward, especially as Galbraith had a stupid fashion of staring.

" No; I want to go there, and yet I dread it."

" Indeed ! Why ?"

" Because—you will, perhaps, laugh at me—I have scarcely an acre of the old lands left ; and I can't stand seeing another lording it over what ought to be mine."

"Laugh! No, I should be the last to laugh. I should stake my existence on a struggle to get back my own."

And she looked full into Galbraith's eyes.

"And you would be no mean antagonist, I fancy," said he, returning her gaze with an earnestness from which she did not shrink. I wonder, Mrs. Temple, if you and I ever met before in some different state of existence? for I sometimes think you look upon me as an enemy."

"Me! What an extraordinary idea!" exclaimed Kate, laughing, but colouring too—a glow that mounted quickly, and, then fading, left her cheek to its ordinary rich paleness.

"Yes. There was something in your eyes when first they met mine I shall never forget. Had you been a man I should have snatched up some weapon to defend myself."

"Pooh! nonsense!" she returned, again laughing; but there was a curious sound of suppressed pleasure in the low, soft laugh. "I had been vexed in my business. Some one had tried to cheat me, perhaps; or I doubted your solvency, and imagined I had a bad bargain in my drawing-room apartments."

There was a subtle tone of mockery in the

last words, a curl of the ripe red lip suggestive of playful scorn.

"I do not pretend to guess the reason ; I only know the effect," returned Galbraith, and there was a pause longer than the last, for Kate's eyes had fixed themselves on the distant horizon unconsciously, as she reflected on the strange eddy of fortune which had made Sir Hugh Galbraith her companion in this remote corner, while he availed himself of her averted gaze to drink in greedily the charm of the frank, fair face before him—its sweet, firm mouth and soft pale cheek, the large eyes so still and deep when she was silent, so changeful and expressive when she spoke or listened ; the broad but not high forehead ; the delicate yet distinctly marked brows ; the look, as if no mean thought, no low motive could lurk in a brain so nobly lodged.

Galbraith had hitherto considered himself, and had been considered, a cold, immovable kind of fellow, but he was conscious that these characteristics were fast melting away ; there was something in his companion's beauty and bearing which exercised a magic effect upon his half-developed nature, as certain chemical ingredients, at the approach of that which attracts, or contains the complement of

their being, rush forth to blend with what has called them to life. The deep calm, the solitude, the tender beauty of sea and sky, the unusual tinge of familiarity in Mrs. Temple's manner, lapped him into a kind of Elysium such as he had never before known. As yet, he could enjoy the first warm breath of the coming sirocco, before the fever and thirst were upon him.

"What a relief it must be to you to come here from the shop," exclaimed Galbraith abruptly, fearing that if the silence continued Mrs. Temple might get up and walk away.

"It is, indeed," she returned frankly.

"Then you don't like your work?"

"I do not dislike it," said Kate, falling unconsciously into a semi-confidential strain. "I would rather earn my bread as a first-class artist, or writer; but as nature has not made me of suitable stuff, I must do what I can. I do not fancy the restraint of teaching, or keeping a school."

"Still, such a position must be very unpleasant to you; for I never will believe you were originally intended for it."

"Oh, as to that, you may conjecture what you like, Sir Hugh; but I have told you there is no romance about me or my position," said

she, turning her eyes, which laughed sunnily, upon him.

"I dare say you will think I am a presumptuous fellow," returned Galbraith, leaning towards her, resting the elbow of his sound arm on his knee, and his cheek on his hand; "but I am always conjecturing about you. You are a constant mystery to me, and I am determined to solve it!"

The earnest, uncomplimentary manner in which Galbraith uttered these words took from them all appearance of love-making. Nevertheless, they sent a strange gust of triumph along Kate's nerves; her contemptuous enemy was growing interested in her. He acknowledged her superiority.

"The presumption consists in telling me so," she said, still meeting his eyes with an arch smile. "I cannot help your thoughts; only they must sorely want legitimate employment when you waste them on—your landlady," there was a slight pause before she uttered the last words with provoking emphasis, which she could not restrain; there is such a charm in feeling oneself charming.

Sir Hugh raised his head quickly, as if about to speak, and then stopped.

"But in a few days you will be away,

among your natural occupations and associates—the mystery you have created for yourself will cease to interest or annoy,” she continued.

“I hope it will,” returned Galbraith bluntly; “I hope it will—but,” again resting his cheek on his hand, and looking up into her eyes, “am I to take what you say as a notice to quit?”

“A Sunday notice is not a legal warning—so I was informed when I inquired into the laws affecting landlord and tenant, previous to letting lodgings,” said Kate demurely.

“But do you wish me to leave?”

“No, not before you are quite fit to move. But of course it is absurd to suppose you will remain beyond a week or so! Your kinsfolk and acquaintance would think you daft if you stayed on here without any adequate inducement, and justly.”

Sir Hugh’s brow lowered, and he twisted his moustaches thoughtfully. “I suppose,” he said, “a fellow may please himself in spite of his kinsfolk and acquaintance — mine troubled me deuced little in former days! Do you wish me to go?”

“Wish to lose a good tenant! Certainly not,” she replied with a smile—an irrepressible smile. “But I ought to tell you that, after

the middle of April, I wish to have my rooms ready for a tenant of last year, who made me promise to take him in if he wanted to come."

"Oh!"—a very dissatisfied oh! "I must march, then!"

He was more mortified than he liked to acknowledge; this woman, the hem of whose garment he could have taken up and kissed, so much had he lost his common sense, deliberately told him that he was to her a mere every-day tenant, and no more. But it was better so; otherwise he, Galbraith, might make such an ass of himself that he could never get into the lion's skin again.

"But it will be dark if I stay any longer," said Mrs. Temple, rising, "and the path here is not too safe."

"Don't go!" cried Galbraith, almost vehemently, "there will be an hour of daylight yet, and when shall we have such an evening again? I mean, when shall I have such an evening, if I am to get the route next week? I beg your pardon!" seeing the look of wonder in his companion's eyes at the sort of despairing entreaty in his voice. "I fancy I must have grown whimsical and—and unlike myself, after my long imprisonment. I do not think I am much of a sentimentalist, but I

was always fond of evening and the sea—and all that sort of thing, even when I was a boy.” This was said with a kind of burst, as if ; came in spite of himself, and he was rather ashamed.

“ And do you despise yourself for loving such beauty as this ?” returned Kate, with a slight gesture of her hand towards the sea. “ How strange the effect of a man’s life must be when all that *we* are taught to admire and take pleasure in is despised by them. No wonder there is so little true friendship between men and women !”

“ I don’t despise myself for loving beauty in any shape,” said Galbraith, as he traced an imaginary pattern with his stick on the boards of the landing-place, “ but I can’t talk poetically about it. I should make an ass of myself if I tried !”

“ If you have the feeling it will out ! How do you know you are not a mute inglorious Milton ? How do you know that you have experienced the whole circle of feeling ?”

A grim smile, not devoid of humour, lit up his face. “ I think you have made a capital random shot !” he said.

“ Then did you never read any poetry ?”

“ N—not much. I have heard some read.”

“Do you read novels?”

“No.”

“Do you ever read anything?”

“Yes, Mrs. Temple!” laughing good-humouredly. “I have read a good deal on professional subjects, and history, and politics. Come, does that redeem me a little from the general ruck of blockheads?”

“A little — yes,” she said thoughtfully. “But do you not care for the living spirit that animates these dry bones—the skeleton frame of facts? Do you not enjoy the genius which, out of the clay of every-day events, the mere matter of action, moulds exquisite forms, and breathes into them the breath of life? and more—that touches the sleeping God within us? or gives the dull sullen prisoner in the body’s cage a glimpse of light and liberty?”

“Go on!” said Galbraith in a low voice. “I am not sure that I take it all in, but I like to listen.”

“I dare say you laugh at my outburst! and I am not going to talk for your amusement,” replied Kate, smiling. “Now, Sir Hugh, do not let me curtail your enjoyment of this delicious evening, but *I* am going home!”

“And so am I,” said he rising, “for at present your home is mine.”

His pertinacity and unusual sympathetic frankness amused and interested her, yet it would not do to meet all Pierstoffe as it returned from church accompanied by a baronet; for the present she let him go on however. He was assiduous in his attempts to draw her back to the enthusiastic strain, which gave so much animation to her eyes, and mobile lips, but in vain. The effort, nevertheless, made Galbraith talk unusually well, and before they had accomplished the distance between the coastguard station and the town, he had risen a degree or two in her opinion. Hitherto her estimate of his intellectual powers was by no means exalted ; she had told Tom Reed that he gave her the idea of a stupid obstinate man, whose education had been neglected.

That he was well bred, though no drawing-room gentleman, she could not deny, and on the present occasion there was more than politeness in the excessive care with which he watched every opportunity offered by the slight difficulties of the path, to assist or guard her. “Had he been in England when I married, and seen and known everything, he would have been more just to me, perhaps ! and all this mischief might have been avoided,” she thought. “But no ; he is a man of such

strong prejudices, that I dare say if I were to tell him who I am now, his friendliness would stiffen into stern contempt. To him I shall always be an adventuress. Well, his opinion is nothing to me." Such were the ideas floating through her mind as she listened, with soft attentive eyes, to her unsuspecting companion's exposition of his views as to the best method of managing the natives of India, with which it is needless to say she entirely disagreed. But they were too near the town to permit of argument. Mrs. Temple stopped short, and said, "Be so good, Sir Hugh, as to walk on, and leave me to return alone. All Pierstoffe would be horrified at the incongruity of a baronet escorting the proprietress of a fancy bazaar." She smiled brightly, sweetly, and Galbraith almost permitted the words, "D—— Pierstoffe," which rose naturally to his lips, to escape; but he changed them to "What bosh!"

"No, it is not bosh," said Mrs. Temple. "It is only consistent with your own conservative principles."

"I do not like to leave you alone in the dusk."

"Nevertheless, you must," she returned decidedly.

"I obey," said Galbraith, raising his hat ; quickening his steps, he was soon out of sight, while Kate, slowly following, reached her house without any further adventure.

She had a long tearful talk with Fanny, after they had bid Tom good-night and good-bye, as he had to start by the first train for town next day. Fanny had utterly rejected the idea of leaving her friend at present, or till she had renounced the Berlin wool trade. She confessed to a quarrel with Tom on this subject, but also to a reconciliation, the very recollection of which called up dimpling smiles and blushes. No ! she would not quit Kate ; she never thought she would be so important a person, but she now saw quite well that Kate could not get on without her.

Mrs. Temple urged that Tom Reed would have just cause to complain if Fanny preferred her friend to her lover, and at last it was decided that when Tom was actually appointed to the chieftainship of the "M. T." it would be time enough to talk about separating. In the interest excited by Tom and Fanny's affairs, Mrs. Temple forgot, or omitted to mention, her rencontre with Galbraith, and having done so, did not care to revert to the subject, especially as her friend had asked her

no questions. But, in the solitude of her own room, a review of the conversation called up a smile half triumphant and wholly amused to the young widow's lip, as she remembered that little less than a year ago she had sat under the yew tree in Hampton Court gardens, and quivered with indignant feeling at the scorn heaped upon her by the man, whose tones of entreaty for a few minutes more of her society still rang in her ear !



CHAPTER VIII.

STHE friends anticipated, Lady Styles lost no time, on her return to Weston, in investigating the state of affairs at the Berlin Bazaar, and on the day following Tom's visit she made her appearance at an unusually early hour after luncheon.

"Well, Mrs. Temple, how have you all been? I feel as if I had been away a year instead of six weeks. Do you know, I don't like any neighbourhood as well as my own; it's a great advantage to be within a drive of a Berlin Bazaar—especially when it is so well managed—ha! ha! ha! I want three skeins of yellow shaded, and two of green, five of

crimson, and—there ! your young person can take the paper and put all the things together, while I talk to you. You are looking uncommonly well ; and how are you getting on with your tenant—your patient—the man that broke his head ? Slade tells me he is here still ; not a bad business for you.”

“ No, Lady Styles. It has answered very well to have my rooms occupied ; but Sir Hugh Galbraith leaves this week.”

“ Oh ! indeed—yes, Dr. Slade gives an indifferent account of him, says he is so impatient and proud, and—all sorts of things. Have you found him so, eh ?”

“ I only know that he pays regularly, and gives very little trouble,” replied Mrs. Temple, smiling placidly, and perfectly understanding the drift of the question.

“ Oh, indeed ; that is very nice, very nice indeed. You know, you would make such a charming nurse ; I thought he might have claimed his landlady’s personal care,” cried Lady Styles, with a jolly laugh.

“ My good old servant has acted the part of landlady and nurse for me,” returned Mrs. Temple.

“ Oh, very prudent; quite right, quite right,” said her ladyship, looking round with an eagle

eye, in search of some chink into which she might insert the point of her wedge-like inquiries. "I don't think you have quite so many pretty things as you used. I hope you are not neglecting your business."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Temple, drily. "But I have not yet bought my spring goods; in a week or two I hope to offer a choice selection of novelties."

"That will be charming. Well, Mrs. Temple, if Sir Hugh Galbraith is at home, I think it right to call upon him. I will go in, if you please!"

"I never know if he is in or out, Lady Styles. But if you will go round to the front door the servant will tell you."

"Oh, very well, very well. You see, he is a great friend of a cousin of mine, and I wish to show him a little attention—to explain why I have not been to see him before. I will look in again, Mrs. Temple, for my wools and canvas, and tell you what I think of him." So saying, her ladyship walked, or, to be more accurate, waddled away round to the entrance, and there made a tolerable imitation of her footman's knock.

Mills, "simple, erect, severe, austere," in due time—not too soon—opened the door in

a snowy cap, apron, and net handkerchief, the very picture of an old family servant.

"Ah! I see," thought Lady Styles, with a delighted sense of her own rapid perception, "this is the nurse. I wonder where Slade found her."

"Good-morning," she said to Mills, who had now reached a condition which defied the most startling combination of circumstances to surprise. "How is your patient? If he is pretty well and visible to-day, I will come in and see him."

"Is it Mrs. Temple you are wanting, ma'am?" asked Mills, to whom this address was dumb show.

"She is as deaf as a post," exclaimed Lady Styles. "No, no," in louder tones. "Sir Hugh Galbraith. I want to see Sir Hugh Galbraith."

"Yes, he is in, ma'am."

"Just tell him Lady Styles would be happy to come up and see him."

"Walk in, if you please," and Mills ushered her ladyship into the pretty sitting-room opening on the garden, where she immediately occupied herself in a close examination of all books, photographs, &c., &c., which lay upon the table. Meantime, Mills bent

her rheumatic steps to Sir Hugh's apartment.

"There is a lady wants to see you."

"A lady!" echoed Galbraith, looking up from some notes he was trying to make in pencil with his left hand. "What sort of a lady?"

"Oh, a stout lady, as is often in the shop. A lady somebody, sir."

"Lady Styles, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "She has not lost much time. Well, show her up," he added resignedly, while he hastily put his papers together and shut them in his blotting-book, before Mills opened the door and ushered in his visitor.

"Sir Hugh Galbraith," said Lady Styles, in her best manner, as she entered, "I really could not let you be here in a sort of savage land without coming to look after you. Colonel Upton mentioned you to me as his particular friend, and had I not been detained in Yorkshire by poor Sir Marmaduke's indisposition I should have had the honour of calling on you before."

"You are very good," returned Galbraith, advancing a chair. "Pray sit down," which her ladyship, being rather out of breath from the ascent of the staircase, did very readily.

"I think," she resumed, "I have the plea-

sure of knowing your sister, Lady Lorrimer. I met her at dinner, where I was staying in Yorkshire. I cannot say I see much resemblance between you.” Galbraith bowed. “And tell me, Sir Hugh, are you feeling better and stronger?”

“I am nearly all right, thank you. Can’t venture to use my arm yet, the doctor tells me. I hope to get away the end of this week or beginning of next.”

“Then, my dear sir,” cried Lady Styles with much animation, “you had much better come over and spend the remainder of your convalescence at Weston. We will take great care of you; and I have one or two very pleasant people staying with me.”

“You are really very good, Lady Styles, but I am quite comfortable here. When I am fit to be seen I will do myself the honour of calling upon you.”

“Fit to be seen, my dear Sir Hugh!” echoed her ladyship. “The less fit you are to be seen, the more ready all my young lady friends will be to admire you.”

“My dear Lady Styles, I do not like young ladies, and I am quite unaccustomed to be admired.”

“What a monster!” cried Lady Styles,

laughing. "But they make you tolerably comfortable here?"

"Very comfortable indeed."

"Do you ever see your landlady, eh?" sharply.

"I have seen her," returned Galbraith, with an immovable face.

"She interests me very much," resumed Lady Styles, with animation. "I am quite sure there is some romance attached to her. She is so ladylike and quiet; yet an excellent woman of business. Then she reminds me of two or three people. Has it ever struck you?"

"What? her likeness to two or three people? I cannot say it has," replied Galbraith, so coldly and indifferently that Lady Styles was checked for a moment.

"What a nice, respectable nurse you appear to have. I must ask Slade for her address; it is well to know such a person. Pray, have you found her satisfactory in every respect? sober, vigilant, and all that, eh?"

"Who?" asked Galbraith, puzzled by this flank movement.

"The nurse—the old woman who let me in."

"You mean Mrs. Mills! She is the servant

and manager of the house. I thought she was the landlady till the other day. I have never been reduced to a nurse."

"Oh, indeed! Now, there, Sir Hugh! there is another remarkable fact; the very servant is out of the common. Mark my words, there is some mystery here."

Sir Hugh bent his head in silence.

"I imagine all sorts of things about that charming young widow. They *do* say her husband is still alive, and imprisoned for some dreadful crime; but I cannot help fancying that she has never been married, but has been well connected, and obliged to part with her protector? eh, Sir Hugh? At my age one knows, unfortunately, too much of the wickedness of the world—and—hasn't it struck you?"

"No, certainly not," returned Galbraith, starting up and stirring the fire violently, "my experience of the world suggests nothing of the kind."

"Dear me! doesn't it?" said Lady Styles, innocently; "but you have been a long time out of England, and of course you haven't seen Mrs. Temple as much as I have. Then you have formed no theory respecting your landlady?"

"Why should I?" exclaimed Galbraith, abruptly. "A quiet woman earning her bread honestly ought to be spared theories and conjectures."

"Now, Sir Hugh, that is too severe. I suppose you mean I am a gossip, and I am nothing of the kind; but I am hugely sympathetic. I confess I take a deep, a sincere interest in the people I live amongst. There's the Doctor! *He* is a gossip if you will, and between you and me, not the most good-natured of gossips; but he affects to be above all that sort of thing. Haven't you noticed it?"

"I am not observant," returned Sir Hugh, wearing his grimmest aspect. So Lady Styles wandered to another subject.

"I was very pleased to hear that old Mr. Travers came to his senses at last, and made a proper will. It would have been shocking if he had left everything to the widow."

"She would probably differ from you," said Galbraith, drily.

"Oh! I fancy it was a bitter disappointment to *her*. I believe she was a very grasping creature; a connection of mine, the Honourable Mrs. Danby, lived next door, at the time of poor Mr. Travers's death, and tried to show her a little attention; but she was rather ungracious;

would not accept any invitation, and was very unneighbourly and disobliging about her carriage: would rather let her horses eat their heads off in the stable than allow a mortal to use it but herself, and was always closetted with a clerk of Mr. Travers's—over accounts—or heaven knows what—quite a low fellow!"

"Well," returned Galbraith, who would have stood up for Beelzebub himself against Lady Styles; "it was only decent to keep quiet after her husband's death, and people don't generally keep carriages for their neighbours to use."

"I protest, Sir Hugh, you are severely just. However, it was rather hard of the husband to leave her penniless; depend upon it, he had reason to think her undeserving. Does it strike you?"

"We have no right to say anything of the sort."

"Pardon me, Sir Hugh, such a will gives us every right. Do you know what has become of her?"

"No," returned Galbraith.

"Dear me! I wonder you had not the—the curiosity to inquire. Mrs. Danby heard she had gone abroad; depend upon it, she

had contrived to get a sum of money, or a settlement of some kind; she could not live on air. It would be awkward now if she were to dispute the will."

"That is not likely."

"Well, I don't know; these sort of women—greedy, uneducated women, I mean—are very fond of litigation. Suppose she got hold of some sharp, unscrupulous solicitor."

"I never suppose things," very sternly.

"Well, Sir Hugh, I think you are looking very tired, and I shall bid you good-morning," said Lady Styles, giving him up as a hopeless subject. "I am truly glad your uncle—wasn't he your uncle? No?—whatever he was then—that he disposed of his property as he did. By the way, do you keep up the business still?"

"The house still exists."

"Then I really do wish you would give one of the rector's sons a berth in it. Most deserving people, but poor—wretchedly poor. What between dilapidations and thirteen children—terrible, isn't it? Now, do think of them. Men like you have a great deal in their power, and you ought to consider yourself a steward for the benefit of others. By the way, Willie Upton talks of coming over

for a week or two. He has business in London ; so you really must come and meet him. Don't let me keep you standing. Oh, by the way, I just want to speak a word to Mrs. Temple before I go. May I ring the bell ?" —ringing it.

This unexpected stroke paralyzed Galbraith for a moment. It seemed a sort of sacrilege to call up the gentle, dignified lady of the house to be cross-examined by this rampant old woman.

"I do not think Mrs. Temple usually leaves her shop," he said, hastily ; "Mills is virtually mistress of the house."

"Oh, she will come for me," said Lady Styles, with a provoking triumphant nod. "I was her first patron, and I know she looks on me as her sheet anchor." To Mills, as she presented herself, "Pray, give my compliments to Mrs. Temple ; I should like to speak to her for two minutes—just *two* minutes."

"What, here, ma'am ?"

"Yes, here," smiling graciously ; "I wish to tell her, before you, what I want," continued Lady Styles to Galbraith, with many nods and smiles, and resuming her seat, while he, in gloomy discomfort, stood upon the hearth-rug. Lady Styles talked on, but he scarce

heard even the sound of her voice, so anxiously was he watching the door. At last it opened, and Mrs. Temple came in. Her ordinary and exceedingly simple attire could not conceal the grace of her figure, nor had the unexpected summons disturbed the composed, collected expression of her face. Galbraith made a step forward, and bowed. She returned the salutation in silence.

“ Well, Mrs. Temple, I have been persuading Sir Hugh Galbraith to come over to Weston. We should take excellent care of him, and I dare say with your shop and all, you have quite enough to do without attending to an invalid.”

“ My servant, Mills, attends to the house. I have scarce anything to do with it,” said Mrs. Temple coldly. “ But I have no doubt Sir Hugh Galbraith would have more comfort and amusement at your ladyship’s residence.”

“ I cannot go, however,” said Sir Hugh, resolutely, “ though much obliged, and all that——”

“ Well, Mrs. Temple, if Sir Hugh fancies fruit or vegetables, or flowers, or anything, pray send for them. By the way! have you ever been over to Weston, Mrs. Temple? It

is a very pretty place; people often drive from Stoneborough to look at it. If you come over some afternoon, about five, you will be in time for the housekeeper's room tea, and they will be delighted to see you, though I doubt if you will get such good bread, butter, and shrimps as I had here—ha! ha! ha! Well, good-morning, Sir Hugh. Good-morning, Mrs. Temple," and her ladyship rolled with amazing rapidity out of the room, attended by Galbraith, who with difficulty restrained his lips from bad words. The moment the door was closed upon her he returned quickly, hoping to meet Mrs. Temple; but she had vanished.

Galbraith was greatly incensed by this visit, and all the gossip he had been compelled to listen to. It stung him to hear poor Travers's widow spoken of in such a tone, though he was quite sure she deserved it. Then it vexed him to have the possible claims and probable destitution of that adventuress brought before his notice. He had urged his solicitor repeatedly to seek her out and relieve her necessities, which he felt to be a blot upon his scutcheon. What evil fortune ever brought the creature across his path? There was one morsel of her ladyship's out-

pouring that dwelt on his mind pertinaciously. "They say her husband is in prison for some crime." He took this sentence, and looked at it by every light that Mrs. Temple's bearing, expression, or surroundings threw upon it, and he finally decided that it was utterly false. But his reflections revealed to him what a burning agony it would be to know that she had a living husband. In vain he strove to banish the idea with half-uttered exclamations that it was nothing to him, that he was unhinged by illness, or he would not give the subject a second thought; it would return with threatening distinctness.

"This folly grows serious," thought Galbraith; "I must shake it off. But I have been warned off the premises, so I will go—positively next week—next Saturday; twenty-four hours in London will no doubt effect a radical cure."

But he was desperately restless all day, and walked and drove as if urged to and fro by an evil spirit. He was haunted by the suppressed amused arch-smile that flickered round the young widow's lips at Lady Styles's general invitation to the housekeeper's room. It was the natural expression of one too much above the proposition to be offended.

Finally, after walking up and down his room till he heard the church clock strike seven, he seized his hat, put the last *Quarterly* under his arm, and stalked downstairs as if to go out, but he did not. He knocked at the shop-parlour door, and, in reply to Fanny's "Come in," passed the magic portal with an apology, and so gave himself up to one more enchanted evening. Fanny was in great spirits, and chaffed her friend merrily on being invited to the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Temple was rather silent, bestowing much attention on her work. But Hugh Galbraith was content. Nevertheless, when he rose to depart he observed, "As it is not the Sabbath, Mrs. Temple, I suppose I may give legal warning that I intend quitting my pleasant quarters on Saturday."

"Very well," said Mrs. Temple, with unmistakable and mortifying alacrity. "I accept it, and will be so far indulgent that I shall not insist on your vacating your apartments before twelve, which is, I believe, the strict law."

"If it is any accommodation to you," returned Galbraith stiffly, "I can turn out on Friday."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, with a smile so

frank and sweet, that Galbraith could have kissed her for it on the spot ; “ I do not wish to hurry you in any way ; you have been an excellent tenant, but I must not be too selfish, so I am glad you are well enough to leave.”

This was said in a tone of the most conventional politeness—a tone that could not be complained of, and yet that robbed the kind words of half their kindness.

“ Thank you; good-night,” replied Galbraith shortly, and departed, without taking any notice of Fanny.

“ Well !” cried that young lady, looking up from a book in which she was writing out a wonderful receipt for a crochet border that had been lent to her, “ you do your best to retard that unfortunate man’s recovery ! You play upon him frightfully, though he is not a very harmonious instrument. Pray, have you the face now to say he is not in love with you ?”

“ You know how much I dislike such idle talk, Fanny. I do not think Sir Hugh Galbraith knows what love means. A cold, stiff, stern man like him fall in love ! Pooh ! He is a little piqued, and puzzled, and interested in me—I mean *us*—but a day or two of his old occupations — a race, a pigeon match,

would put his nearly six weeks' sojourn here out of his head. Besides, it would be unpardonable presumption in a man like him to associate me with such ideas," concluded Kate, raising her head haughtily.

"I know it's a weakness," said Fanny, reflectively ; "but I cannot help it. Sir Hugh has, I can see, a great contempt for me, yet I like him, though I try not. There is a sort of lazy lordliness about him—a carelessness of small things ! I know he behaved very badly to you—abominably !" in reply to Kate's surprised look ; "of course I hate him for that ; but I can tell you I know a great deal more of love than you do."

" You might, easily !" murmured Kate to herself.

" What do you say ?" continued Fanny. " Oh, you think nobody ever looked at me but Tom ! Well, you are mistaken ! There was a man in Yorkshire (that dreadful place you rescued me from, you dear !), and I am quite sure he was in love with me !"—a little triumphant nod — " though you may not believe it."

" Yes, I do, Fan ! Go on ; tell me all about it."

" He was ever so much older than I am ; a

great, tall, gaunt-looking man, not at all unlike poor Sir Hugh—the same sort of sunken, melancholy eyes, but fierce sometimes. I was rather afraid of him. To be sure he did not speak like Sir Hugh ; he had the dreadful Yorkshire accent. I was always inclined to laugh when he spoke. He was the uncle of my pupils."

"What made you think he was in love with you?"

"I can hardly tell. He was always coming into the school-room, and I am sure it was too miserable a place to come to unless you wanted something very much. Then he was horribly cross and savage to me ; but he was down on any one else that was rude. I think he was ashamed of himself for caring about me ; and I remember once, when he found me crying
—"

"Well, do go on !" cried her attentive listener.

"Oh, nothing, only he was rather foolish."

"Did he propose for you ?"

"Not he !" said Fanny, laughing ; "he was far too prudent ; he might though, had I remained."

"And should you have accepted him ?"

"To be sure I should," returned Fanny.

Her friend was rather scandalized. "What!" she exclaimed; "this man whom you feared and laughed at!"

"If he had got over things enough to make me his wife, I should have known I needn't fear a man who was so fond of me, and I should have thought him too good a fellow to laugh at. Oh! Kate, you don't know how wretched I was!"

"Did you feel inclined to love him at all?" asked Mrs. Temple, her thoughts reverting to the absent lover.

"Not a bit," said Fanny, cheerfully. "Thank goodness, he did not make up his mind in time, or I should have missed Tom, and Tom is a thousand, million times nicer and better! I wonder why Tom took such fancy to a stupid thing like me? What luck I have had! But I shan't tell him that. He requires a good deal of keeping down," and Fanny shook her head wisely.

Mrs. Temple did not reply; she was thinking of the wonderful difference between her friend's nature and her own. She knew she had more courage, and firmness, and reason, than Fanny; yet she should never dream of "keeping down" a man she loved, if she ever did love. If she ever gave her heart, it would be to some one

she could look up to so entirely that all her care would be to deserve his esteem, not to rise above him, or keep him down—an intellectual ideal very unlikely to be realised, and exceedingly unpleasant if it was. Yet Fanny believed Tom the first man of the day, and infinitely her superior even when talking and thinking thus. “She will, probably, always have more influence than I,” thought Kate. “Why is this?”

But Fanny was talking again. “Now, Sir Hugh always reminds me of poor Mr. West. He is growing fond of you and hates you at the same time, and despises himself all the while for caring about you.”

“Despises himself,” repeated her listener, with scornful, curling lips.

“Oh! if you would hang down your head, and sigh, and seem mysteriously broken-hearted, I daresay it would be all over with him; but to see you face him like the rock that wouldn’t fly (what is it in that poem?), and look right into his eyes with those big, earnest ones of yours, makes him feel that you are more than his match. Why, even *I* feel half afraid of them now!”

“Fanny,” exclaimed Mrs. Temple, “how did you learn all this?”

“Learn it! I don’t know, I am sure; it seems to come into my head of its own accord. But I am certain I am right!”

“You are wonderful; you astonish me!”

“Do I? Well, then, I am astonished myself! After all, I may turn out one of those swells who can ‘Lay bare the workings of the Human Heart,’ with capital H’s. I shall write at once to Tom, and tell him what a wonderful discovery I have made.”

“Do, dear; but first give me your word never to talk in this strain of Sir Hugh Galbraith again! It is unbecoming and absurd! In a few days he will be gone, and we shall never see his face again, nor will he even hear of me—unless, as I trust in Heaven I shall, I come before him as the successful opponent of the will which robbed me to enrich him.”

“We never know what is before us,” said Fanny, sagely. “But there, dear! I will never say anything to vex you if I can help it.”

For the two succeeding days the friends saw nothing of Galbraith, who was suffering from a severe fit of the sulks, and was constantly out of doors, although the weather was showery and rough.

He certainly intended to leave, for elaborate

preparations were made for a move ; and his servant informed Mrs. Mills that, if his master did want to stay at Pierstoffe for a day or two longer, he would go to the hotel—a proposition which excited Mills's wrath as a flagrant act of ingratitude, after “ her slaving and waiting on him hand and foot ; but it was all of a piece ”—meaning his conduct.

Fanny collected some magazines and reviews he had lent, and carefully made out a copy of his bill, to have it in readiness. She made an excellent chancellor of the exchequer Mrs. Temple attended assiduously to her shop. She was really glad the enemy was going to retreat, for she was half afraid something unpleasant might occur, since Fanny had opened her stores of wisdom.

Lady Styles had made another incursion, with a carriage-load of ladies who purchased largely, while their conductress abused Sir Hugh Galbraith to her heart's content. “The most tiresome, conceited, ill-bred man she had ever met ;—but the Galbraiths always were the most over-bearing, ill-tempered people, my dear. The late Sir Frederick—this man's father —was the best of them, and bad was the best !” Mrs. Temple smiled.

“ My dear Mrs. Temple, who is it that you

remind me of so very strongly, especially when you smile? I seem to have known you all my life. Look here, Elizabeth!" to a grand lady who was buying views of Piers-toffe. "Does Mrs. Temple remind you of any one?" The lady appealed to squeezed up her eyes, and calmly perused Kate's features. "I am not sure, but I fancy she has a look of Lady William Courtenay."

"Yes, to be sure, that is it!—a niece of mine. How stupid of me not to see it before! Pray what was your name before your marriage?"

"Smith," returned Mrs. Temple shortly; "but, excuse me, I cannot see that my appearance or name has anything to do with my business, which is to sell you fancy-work of all descriptions!"

"Very fair! quite right! I protest I beg your pardon!" cried her ladyship. "And so that disagreeable man is going on Saturday—positively, Slade tells me. I am sure I congratulate you! I imagine he is a good deal set up by getting his uncle's fortune so unexpectedly. The uncle married a doubtful sort of woman, and they feared he would leave her everything; but he changed his mind in time. Dear me, Elizabeth! Laura! There is Sir

Hugh himself, just passing the window." A rather undignified scuffle to see the object of Lady Styles's remarks gave Mrs. Temple time to recover herself. She was astonished to find her story, at any rate partially, known in that remote locality.

She did not know the freemasonry of caste —the electric telegraphy that sends all reports and tattle touching themselves flashing through the ranks of those linked together by the common possession of that mysterious attribute termed "blue blood."



CHAPTER IX.

THE morning before Galbraith's departure the postman had only two letters for the Berlin Bazaar; one directed to "Sir Hugh Galbraith, Bart. ;" the other to Miss Lee, in Tom Reed's well-known writing. It was not a lengthy epistle, nevertheless it evidently gave both pleasure and amusement, for Fanny's face was dimpled with smiles as she read. Mrs. Temple glanced at her kindly and sympathisingly, as she poured out the tea.

"I think, Fan, you have dropped something out of your letter," she said.

"Have I?" starting, and picking up a small note that had been enclosed in Tom's missive.
"To be sure! He says it is for you."

Mrs. Temple took and opened it. It ran thus : "The day of miracles is not quite over yet! Trapes called here this morning, and absolutely repaid me a sovereign I had lent him last week, and which I had fondly hoped would have kept him at a distance for months. Though stunned, I remembered your desire for his address, and recovered sufficiently to procure it: 'J. Trapes, Esq., care of W. Bates, The Red Boar, King Street, Islington.' One word more: by no means communicate with this fellow except through myself or somebody equally devoted to your interest."

"This is very curious! It is a good omen!" exclaimed Kate.

"What?" said Fanny.

Kate gave a short explanation, the shorter because she saw Fanny glance from time to time at her letter, which she evidently wished to re-peruse.

When breakfast was over, Kate went to their best sitting-room to lock away Mr. Trapes's address, with her evidence book, and a few other papers of importance; and after turning the key, stood a moment in thought. She did not know why she permitted the idea of this man to associate itself in her mind with Ford. She could not help believing that

his tale of Ford's resemblance to some one who owed him money was a blind, and that Ford himself was the object of his search. What Ford's acquaintance with such a character had to do with her own history she could not tell. She fancied, if she could only see this Trapes, she might get some clue. Now, his unexpected restoration of the sovereign looked like having extracted money from Ford ! She must think it all over coolly and clearly. "I must not let imagination fool me ; yet imagination is the pioneer of discovery." Here the sound of Galbraith's deep, harsh voice caught her ear. He was down in the hall at that early hour, speaking to Mills —asking for herself. "I am here," she said, coming to the open door of the drawing-room.

"I beg pardon for intruding on you at such an hour, Mrs. Temple," said Galbraith, turning to her ; "but I have had a letter which I am very anxious to answer by to-night's post. May I once more trouble you to act as secretary ? Your labours in that line are nearly over ! Any hour before nine will do."

"I shall not be at liberty before seven, and, as it seems a letter of importance, I had better not attempt it till I am safe from interruptions."

"Thank you, thank you!" said Galbraith earnestly. "I shall expect you, then, at seven." He paused a moment, as if on the point of saying more; then bowed, and retreated upstairs.

Mrs. Temple was struck by the animation of his look and manner. "His letter is not a disagreeable one, I am quite sure," she thought. "It is quite as well he is going; this secretaryship would not raise me in the estimation of my fellow townspeople if it were known! What would not Lady Styles say? Fortunately, poor Mills is deaf and incorruptible; and Sarah leaves so early, she sees nothing. I wonder, shall Hugh Galbraith and I ever meet again? That our courses will cross or clash I feel quite sure!"

So thinking, she went slowly into the shop and threw her attention into her business. Still, sudden, sharp conjectures respecting J. Trapes, Esq., would dart through her brain, and also respecting Hugh Galbraith's letter. It came so naturally to her to call him Hugh! In the various conversations in which she had urged his claims upon her husband, they had always spoken of him as "Hugh;" and now, had she not always been on guard when speaking to him, the name

would certainly have escaped her. “I shall really be glad when he is gone, and the odd excitement of his presence removed;” so, honestly thinking, she attended to the many demands of her customers, the day went quickly over, and seven o’clock came round.

For the first time Mrs. Temple had to pause and reason away a slight tinge of embarrassment before she presented herself for the performance of her task. “This is the fruit of Fanny’s foolish talk,” she thought, as she stood before the glass; “but I am no stupid school-girl, to be affected by it! Life has been too real for me not to have steadied my nerves beyond what the implied admiration of an accidental acquaintance could disturb,” and, with a faint increase of colour, a shade more of hauteur in her bearing, Mrs. Temple followed Mills, whom she had sent to inquire if Sir Hugh was ready.

He was, quite. The curtains were drawn, and the lamp lit; for, though daylight had not quite faded, there would not have been enough to finish a letter by.

Galbraith had put his writing materials in readiness on the table, and was leaning against the chimney-piece, holding an open letter, and evidently in a state of expectation. “You

are really very good," he said earnestly, coming forward to meet her, and placing a chair at the table.

His manner put Mrs. Temple at her ease. His business, whatever it was, appeared to occupy him, to the exclusion of any other idea; and Mrs. Temple mentally accused herself of conceit and stupidity for listening to Fanny's suggestions. She accordingly took the offered seat, and, dipping her pen in the ink, looked up to Galbraith for the words.

He dictated slowly and thoughtfully, often looking at the letter in his hand: "Dear Sir, I have yours of the —th. I regret to find you are out of town, and that you have been unwell. The price asked for the property I wish to buy back is much beyond its worth, quite a third more than my father sold it for. I am aware that it is of more value to me than to any other purchaser, but I am not at all inclined to pay a fancy price, and I know that in its present condition much of the land is scarcely worth two pounds an acre. You are quite right in trying to keep me out of sight, though I fear you are too well known as my solicitor. Could you not find some respectable local man who might

act for you in ignorance of your client's name? If the upland called Langley Knolls, which is very good land, be included in the sale, or you can manage to get hold of it, I will go as far as ten thousand for the whole—as much under as you like; but I have this sum at hand, as you know, and I will not go beyond it."

At this point Mrs. Temple stopped short, and, placing her elbow on the table, instinctively shaded her face from Galbraith by placing her hand over her eyes, for the words she had just written stirred her deeply. That ten thousand pounds—she exactly knew where it came from, how it was placed, and why it was available. Little more than a year ago it was hers, and she had her own plans respecting it; now she was writing directions for its disposal in a way that, whatever happened, would put a large portion of it out of her reach. And more, she felt a strange sensation of shame at the sort of treachery she was involuntarily practising; for, if she succeeded in making good her claim to the whole of Mr. Travers's property under the original will, Galbraith would be placed in a position which, from all she could observe of him, would be unspeakably degrading and

distressing to his unyielding nature. So far her acquaintance with him had softened her towards her enemy that she could wish to spare him unnecessary humiliation, if she had ever, even in her angriest mood, wished it; and now, to let him run blindly into the snare—was it honourable or right? “What can I do?” she thought.

But Galbraith had gone on dictating, and stopping to let her pen overtake his words, observed, with a little surprise, that she was not writing. His pause recalled her.

“Excuse me,” she said, in a low voice, not venturing to look up; “but are you wise to allow an utter stranger to know so much of your affairs? If you leave us to-morrow, shall you not soon see your solicitor, and talk over your business? How do you know that I am not a friend of whoever wants an exorbitant price for this land, and will let him know who the purchaser really is? If there are any more very personal topics to come, had we not better stop here?”

Galbraith looked at her in great surprise. “Do you know the man who wants to sell?” he asked sharply.

“No, I do not; but——”

“You are not the material traitors are

made of," said he, after an instant's pause and a searching gaze at the downcast face before him. "I have no secrets. I must write to Layton, for he is away at Scarborough. He has been ill, and has gone for change to his native place. You may write on with a safe conscience; I want to end it, for I am giving you a great deal of trouble."

Mrs. Temple was at the end of her resources, and silently, nervously resumed her pen as Galbraith continued to dictate.

"I am very glad you have found some traces of poor Travers's widow, and beg you will lose no time in following them up. I feel infinitely annoyed to think she is wandering about unprovided for—perhaps subsisting by doubtful means!"

"Have you that down?" asked Galbraith, who began to think Mrs. Temple was not quite up to her mark this evening.

She bent her head, and, with a cheek that first glowed and then turned very pale, wrote on with a beating heart. Traces of herself! What traces? She would make him talk, and so find out.

"Just add," continued Galbraith, "that I beg his attention to this. I should write to

the partner about it, only I wish to keep the inquiry as quiet as possible."

Mrs. Temple wrote on in silence, trying, and successfully, to recover her composure and presence of mind. In a few moments she handed him the letter to read, which he did carefully, and then managed to scrawl his signature with his left hand. He returned it to her with an envelope, showed her the address on Mr. Payne's letter, and rang the bell. "Tell my man to post this at once, and that I want nothing more to-night," said he, when Mills appeared; and he proceeded to pace once or twice to and fro between Mrs. Temple and the door.

"Stay a little," he said, as she made a movement to rise: "so far from having secrets, I feel inclined to tell you something of my history, such as it is; but first tell me why did this letter disturb you?—for you *were* disturbed."

"Well—you see ten thousand pounds is such a quantity of money," said Mrs. Temple, settling herself again and shading her face with her hand; "at least it is to me; you are accustomed to large sums no doubt."

"By Jove, I am not! I have been a poor devil all my life till the other day."

"I should have thought you only knew one

half of life, and that the half in which, as the children say, ‘We go up, up, up,’ ” replied Mrs. Temple, looking at him with an encouraging smile.

“ I have had considerable experience in being hard up,” said Galbraith, who, in his desire to prolong this last interview, was ready to tell anything and everything that could detain his companion. “ You must know that for years I considered myself heir to a rich cousin, who, when I was away in India, thought fit to marry a girl young enough to be his daughter, and low enough to be his housemaid! Not content with this piece of folly, he left her all his money—cutting me off without even the traditional shilling. I came back awfully disgusted. When, to my own and every one’s surprise, another will turned up, making me the heir and cutting her off without the shilling. I suppose the old man had some reason that has never come out. Still, I do not think it was right to leave the woman who bore his name unprovided for. I wanted to make up the deficiency, but, by Jove! she would not accept a sou, declares number two will is a forgery, that she will have all or nothing, and has disappeared. Now the information I wanted from

Payne is about her. He thinks he is on her track : somewhere in Germany, he says," looking at the letter, "that there is a girl's school lately started at Wiesbaden by an English woman, a Mrs. Talboys—heard of it quite accidentally—and that she seems to answer the description of Mrs. Travers."

"Your story interests me," said Mrs. Temple, as he paused. She had quite recovered her self-possession and raised her eyes fully and calmly to his as he stood opposite to her, holding the back of a chair with his left hand. "And I hope all will come right," she added, with a meaning smile, which, looking as he was into her eyes, he did not heed.

"You see," he resumed, "one must always admire pluck in prince or plebeian ; besides, she offered me a tolerable income out of the estate—but that might have been to keep me quiet."

"Was she pretty?" asked Kate, looking down again.

"That I cannot say ; I never saw her. I believe she has red hair ; so Ford told me."

"Did Ford say that?" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, with irrepressible indignation. Then, checking herself, "I mean, it is surprising

your cousin should have fancied so plain a person."

"And his landlady's daughter, by George!" said Galbraith, who had walked to the fire just to get his eyes away from the fascination of his companion's, and now laid hold of the chair-back again. "Poor Travers was rather a fastidious man, but I suppose she was determined to have him. It was a great catch for her, no doubt; still it is always revolting to see a girl sacrifice herself to age."

"I suppose it is," said Mrs. Temple, pushing back her chestnut-brown hair, which was often loosened by its own weight, with a natural, unconscious action, and then clasping her hands, leant them before her on the table, while she yielded to the temptation to plead her own cause to the enemy whose somewhat rugged, generous honesty appealed strongly to her sympathies, her fair face, and soft, earnest eyes uplifted to his with a sincere purpose that banished every shadow of embarrassment. "I suppose it is; but did it ever strike you what a terribly hard lot it is for a woman to be poor and alone? perhaps suddenly bereft of those who surrounded her youth with tenderness, if not with luxuries! I do not think any man can quite realise *how* terrible

it is ; but if you could, you would understand what a temptation an honourable home and the protection of a kind, good, even though elderly, man offers—an irresistible temptation! And if a woman's heart is quite, quite free, believe me, warm, hearty gratitude is no bad substitute for love." She stopped a moment, a little ashamed of the emotion with which she had spoken, and added, in an altered tone, " So I imagine it is in my world. I do not pretend to understand the shibboleth of yours."

Galbraith's words did not come very readily, so absorbed was he by her look, her voice. "I understand *you*," he said at last ; " and if you will not consider my interest impertinence, I should say your description is drawn from experience — your own marriage was something of this ?"

" Something," she returned, looking down and arranging the paper and envelopes before her a little nervously.

" Well," returned Galbraith, closing his large, lean, sinewy, sunburnt hand tightly on the chair-back, " an elderly husband might be satisfied with gratitude and all that sort of thing, but, by heaven, I should not! I should want throb for throb as tender, if not as pas-

sionate, as the love I gave, or I would be inclined to cut my throat!"

Surprised at his tone, Mrs. Temple looked up and met his eyes all aglow with such passionate adoration that she grew paler, and her heart beat with undefined fear at the fire with which she had been playing. Here was something more than she had bargained for, or had ever before met. Moreover, whatever Hugh Galbraith's intellectual powers might be, he was evidently a man whose pertinacity and resolution were not to be trifled with. Had she created trouble for herself, and brought upon herself possibilities of insult far worse than anything she had yet sustained? could she at that moment have borrowed a conjuror's wand, she would have instantly transported Galbraith to a London hotel safe out of her way; but, as she could not, her best plan was to rally her forces and retreat in good order.

"It is growing late," she said, coldly. "I must wish you good-night."

"One moment," returned Galbraith, eagerly, his invention quickened by his ardent desire to keep her a little longer; "it is my last chance of having so good a secretary. May I ask you to write a few lines to Upton?"

"They will scarce be in time for the post."

"No matter, they will go to-morrow."

Mrs. Temple replied by taking some note-paper, and dipping her pen in the ink. Galbraith dictated a few incoherent ungrammatical lines, telling his friend of Lady Styles's visit and invitation, and adding his London address, requesting Upton to join him there.

"Is that all?" asked Mrs. Temple, writing on rapidly, anxious to end the interview.

"Yes." Her pen ran on : suddenly she half uttered a quickly suppressed "Oh!"

"What is the matter?" asked Galbraith, who was again pacing the room.

"Nothing; only I have stupidly made a blunder——" She stopped.

"Let me see," he said, snatching up the paper before she could prevent him.

"You have signed your own name! Kate! I have always wanted to know your name. Kate! It's the best name of all—there is something sweet and frank about it. Kate!" With a quick, eager glance at her face, he pressed his lips greedily on the writing, and then, crushing the paper in his clenched hand, dashed down his arm to its length as if furious with himself.

Mrs. Temple changed colour, but to deeper paleness ; and rising quietly—swiftly, though without hurry — left the room. Galbraith stood still for a minute or two, and then burst into half-uttered curses on his own despicable want of self-control. He had betrayed himself, he had startled and offended the woman he passionately admired, yet could not ask to be his wife. He had altogether behaved like a weak, purposeless blockhead. He was glad he was going away ; yet he would not like to sneak off like a poltroon without making things right. What should he do ?

The next morning before twelve the widow's tenant was ready to decamp.

"He is just going 'm," said Mills, putting her head into the shop, "and he says he wants to speak to you."

"Go, Fanny," was Mrs. Temple's reply.

"Won't you ? Well, I suppose I must."

The door of the dining-room was open, and as Fanny approached she could see Galbraith standing near the window.

"I wanted to shake hands with you before I left," said he, not without a little embarrassment ; "you have all been very good to me. I was most fortunate in finding such care and

help. If there is anything I can do for you at any time, Miss Lee, there's my card—you will be sure to hear of me at my club, and —where's Mrs. Temple? I want to bid her good-bye."

"She is busy; but I will tell her," and Fanny left the room, but soon returned. "She is very sorry, but she is particularly engaged. She desires her best wishes."

Galbraith stood a moment gazing at Fanny in deep thought. "I will not keep her an instant!" he exclaimed. "Go and ask her again. Make her come, like a good girl."

Very much surprised by this appeal Fanny went, but on a fruitless errand.

"She can't come, indeed."

"I am exceedingly sorry that I gave you such useless trouble," said Galbraith sternly. "Good-bye, Miss Lee! Stay—I had almost forgotten," and he took up a small morocco case he had placed upon the table. "Do me the favour to wear this sometimes in memory of your secretaryship. Good-bye," and he was gone.

"Well, I do declare it is a bracelet—a beautiful, solid gold bracelet!" exclaimed Fanny, eagerly peeping into the case. "Now this

was intended for Kate ; but she would not come. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

" Just see what you have lost !" she cried, running in to her friend, who had retreated to the parlour, leaving the shop to take care of itself for a few minutes, lest Galbraith, seeing her there, might persist in making his personal adieux. " Look ! isn't that a lovely bracelet ?"

" Did Hugh Galbraith give it you ?" asked Mrs. Temple.

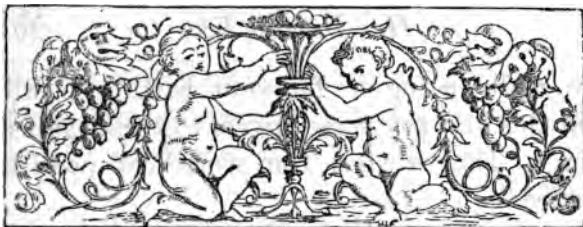
" Yes ! that is what he wanted to see you so much for ; he intended to give it to you."

" Impossible !" she returned, colouring deeply. " I do not think he would have ventured to offer *me* a present. Let me look at it, Fanny." It was more massive than pretty, and had a raised ornament which opened in the centre for hair or a miniature, and holding it out to Fanny Mrs. Temple pointed to the initials " F. L. " inside. " It was meant for you," she said, " I thought he felt *I* was not a person he could offer presents to."

" Well, I am," said Fanny ; " so he showed his sense ! I tell you what, Kate—when you

are really going in for your battle, we will sell this and pay some lawyer to plead against him ! That is what Tom would call poetical justice."

" You little traitor!" cried Kate ; " the rack would be too good for you."



CHAPTER X.

ET was a few days before Easter, when Galbraith found himself at L——'s Hotel. The town was full and busy, yet he had never, even in the dreariest of outposts, felt so desolate as when he began "to take his walks abroad." Society he found, to a certain amount, at his club, but he was rather an uncommunicative man ; he had never given or received much sympathy until accident had placed him within the influence of the first woman who had ever made a real impression upon him. Now he missed the quiet, home-like comfort and care which had surrounded him for the last two months. His full strength had not quite returned,

though he found he could manage his own correspondence now that the occupation of dictating had been robbed of all the charms which pervaded it at Pierstoffe.

Of course, as soon as his return to the haunts of civilisation became known, invitations poured in. His sisters were quite kind in their attentions, having found him much more endurable than he used to be.

"I really think Hugh has been more seriously injured than he believes," said Lady Lorrimer to her younger sister, as they sat together after a friendly little dinner of about a dozen, which Galbraith had been persuaded to join. "He is as silent and morose as if he had lost a fortune instead of coming into one. Now, he was not like that last summer, when he first came back. He was wonderfully bright, and amiable, for *him*. I really thought I had never seen any one so improved by good fortune before. Now he is worse than ever. He often does not seem to hear what you say."

"Deafness," said the Hon. Mrs. Harcourt, arranging the lace on her upper skirt, "often proceeds from concussion of the brain. Poor Hugh! some one really ought to induce him to make his will. The life of a hunting man is so precarious."

"Oh, he is exceedingly likely to follow *us* to the grave!" said Lady Lorrimer, sharply; "but I wish he would stand for Middleburgh. Lorrimer says there will be a vacancy before the session is over, and it would be well for him to represent what used to be a family borough. The more members of a family are in the House the better. In short, the tendencies of the present age are such, that, politically speaking, peers are nobodies."

"Of course he will stand!" cried Mrs. Harcourt, thinking of the possibilities of patronage and her own fledgelings. "Has Lorrimer spoken to him?"

"Yes, and can get no decided answer—in fact, he thinks Hugh far from being himself. However, he has nearly arranged a rather extensive purchase of the property my father sold; and that is a step in the right direction."

Here a mutual dear friend, who thought a close confab between two sisters would not be the worse for an interruption, broke in with some queries touching their disposal of the Easter recess.

"We are going to Paris," returned Lady Lorrimer. "I rather wanted my brother to join us; but he is asked to join the Ash-

field party, which is much better for him. Lady Elizabeth G——, and Miss Dashwood, and some very nice people will be there, and we are naturally anxious he should marry into a good set."

But Galbraith was not made of malleable materials, and quietly threw aside his sister's efforts to guide his career. She was by nature and adoption a manœuvrer—a politician, she would have called it. Having no children of her own, she bestowed her care and thoughts on her husband's party, and the unmarried members of her own family.

Lord Lorrimer was a Whig of the old school, and his wife, considerably his junior, and one of the most exclusive women in London, affected a more advanced Liberalism. She was always attempting to create a party, a *salon*, a *coterie*, and failed signally. It requires a woman of no ordinary calibre to construct such a fabric out of the unsuitable elements of English social life, and the tattle of his sister and her familiars, with their storms in teacups, and ministerial crises that never stirred the ministry, excited Galbraith's profoundest contempt. However, he was not deaf to the voice of the charmer when the charmer whispered of political position, and

to the suggestions of Lord Lorrimer he did seriously incline.

It was the only line of thought in which he found relief from a constant gnawing sense of loss and disappointment of something gone out of his life, that he was perpetually feeling after and longing for. It was all the more idiotic on his part, he told himself, to allow such weakness to master him, as it was evident that Mrs. Temple, if she had any feeling towards him beyond profound indifference, had an unaccountable aversion. Why, he could not divine. Galbraith was by no means inclined to overrate his own attractions ; he was too strong a man to be conceited, and honestly believed he was not the sort of fellow women cared about—a conviction which did not in the least disturb him. But he perhaps exaggerated to himself the advantages which fortune had tardily bestowed upon him, and was quite ready to think himself acceptable to most undowered women on the score of position. Not that he resented this ; it was the ordinary course of things, and Hugh Galbraith was not the sort of man to set up an ideal standard, and fret himself because society fell below it. But in Mrs. Temple he had met something different from all his previous

experience. She was so frank and firm, so well bred in her bold opposition or ready agreement; her very reserve was natural, unstudied, and flecked with gleams of feeling and tenderness, suggesting possibilities that made Galbraith's rather inexperienced heart beat fast. Then, in his eyes, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever met—beautiful, with a rich, queen-like beauty, that touched the senses as well as the intellect—and as he recalled every look and gesture of hers in their last conversation, every varying modulation of her low, clear voice, he understood how men—ay, even men of his mature age—have lost or renounced everything for some fair-faced bit of humanity. But he, Hugh Galbraith, would not make a fool of himself about a woman of whose antecedents he knew nothing, and had no right to inquire, unless, indeed, he committed himself beyond retraction, and she was not a woman to be mocked by shows, without the reality of devotion; besides—and in this probably lay the secret of his prudence—she did not care a rap about him: perhaps she was attached to some other fellow! He could never forget the air of cold, self-possessed disapprobation with which she rose up and left the room when he

kissed the paper where she had written her name, showing none of the fluttered feeling, half fear, half pleasure, with which the first approach of a lover is regarded. He had kept that note, with "Kate" hurriedly written at the foot of the page. He had taken it out of his desk several times with the intention of destroying it, but invariably restored it to its hiding-place, not always without committing the boyish folly of bestowing kisses upon the name, which he would fain have pressed upon the lips of the writer!

However, Galbraith fought gallantly against the terrible madness which had seized him. He rushed to and fro to his solicitor, to his club, to dinners and receptions—he tried hard to find some suitable woman to drive the unsuitable one out of his head. But the plan would not succeed.

Lady Elizabeth G——, whom he had found very nice, quite the correct article, in short, last season, now appeared an inane doll. The animation of some women, the quiet of others, all seemed alike unreal, forced, distasteful. Politics, and the preliminaries of his purchase, alone brought him relief and distraction.

"Mr. Ford was here yesterday," said Mr. Payne to him one morning he was calling at the office when he had been about three weeks

in town. "He wished to ascertain if you had any tidings of Mr. Travers's widow. I simply said you had not. If I remember right, we had a suspicion at the time the matter was fresh (suggested by the omission of Ford's name from Mr. Travers's last will, coupled with disinheriting his wife), that he might possibly have imagined there was some tie between his wife and his clerk which he did not approve. And though Ford tried to be very cool and business-like, I could see he was deeply interested in finding her whereabouts."

"Does he not know?" asked Galbraith carelessly.

"No, I do not think he does."

"Well, I scarcely believe that. You are a shrewder man than I am, Mr. Payne, but I fancy I could make out if he was shamming. I should like to see this Ford. Have you his address?"

"I have."

"Give it to me, then. I want to talk to him. I always fancied he was in communication with the widow. What is he doing?"

"I think he has started as a stockbroker."

"I never could understand why he declined to remain as manager with me. I think I should have kept up the house if he had."

"He acted unwisely, in my opinion. He is too quiet, too respectable a man for his present occupation. It requires a bolder, rougher, readier man. I do not mean to say there are no respectable men on the Stock Exchange, but they are not of Ford's type." The lawyer wrote down the address as he spoke, and handed it to Sir Hugh.

"Thank you. By the way, you have not heard anything more of the widow?"

"Nothing."

"I do not quite believe that report about the school. How did it originate? She can't be fit for such an undertaking."

"I beg your pardon; I believe she is a well-educated woman. The report originated thus: a nephew of mine, who is articled to me, was over in Germany a week or two ago, to bring home a sister of his who was at school at Wiesbaden, and he says the lady with whom his sister was at school complained to him of the competition which was increasing yearly; that only last autumn a young English widow had opened a new school, and succeeded in drawing away two pupils who ought to have come to her. My nephew, a shrewd young fellow, pricked up his ears at this, and made some inquiries, which informed him that the

widow's name was Talboys, that she was tall, with reddish hair, and generally answered the description of Mrs. Travers."

"But why is she Mrs. Talboys—married again?"

"Possibly," returned the lawyer; "but more likely changed her name, if she wished to cut off all connection with her past life, and she would, for obvious reasons, choose a name that would not change initials."

"I don't see her object in changing her name. Why should she evade me? Concealment almost always means wrong-doing."

"Perhaps so. I do not like her vanishing in that way—looks like working a masked mine. But then she can do you no serious harm: that will cannot be contested; and if she has married privately, why, then, it will be evident that Mr. Travers had some reasons, of which we know nothing, for disposing of his property as he did."

"Did your nephew see this woman?"

"No; and it would have done no good if he had. He never saw Mrs. Travers."

"Are there no photographs of her anywhere?"

"I think not. All such things—her clothes, books, jewels, personalities of all kinds—she

was entitled to remove, and did. It was from Mr. Wall (Mr. Travers's solicitor) that I first heard of her disappearance. He says she told him it was her intention to open a school in Germany, and I think he is rather offended by her concealing herself from him, for he seemed very friendly towards her. In fact, he resents your employing any firm but his own, having known you so long."

"That is absurd!" exclaimed Galbraith.
"How could I put my affairs into the hands of my enemy's solicitor?"

"True, quite true; and a somewhat bitter enemy, from what I hear."

"Then Wall knows nothing of Mrs. Travers?"

"Nothing."

"Who does?"

"Oh, a young fellow connected with the press (I believe he writes for some wretched Radical twopenny paper), called Reed. Ford knows his whereabouts."

Galbraith twisted his moustaches in deep, silent thought.

"By the way, Sir Hugh, I think we have found a tenant for your house in Hereford Square, if you are still determined to let it. But you may want it yourself; a wife and

proper establishment are almost a necessity for a man of your fortune and position!"

A fixed, haughty stare, a sternly spoken "I wish it to be let," was the only reply Galbraith vouchsafed to this piece of presumption.

"Very well, Sir Hugh," returned Mr. Payne blandly, while he inwardly chafed at being put down in that way by the insolent soldier, whom twelve months ago he would not have trusted with a hundred pounds! After a little more talk, and a promise that the deed of sale should be ready, and the purchase completed by the following week, Sir Hugh Galbraith rose, wished his solicitor "good morning," and descended the stair. He paused on the door-step, and drawing forth the slip of paper on which Mr. Payne had written Ford's address, read it over, thought for an instant, and hailed a hansom. "To Size Lane," he exclaimed as he sprang in, and cabby, turning sharply round, directed his horse Citywards. Since Galbraith's return to England, and obtaining possession of the fortune he had so nearly lost, his feelings towards his cousin's objectionable wife had been considerably mollified, and Mrs. Temple's words had sunk deep into his heart. His

original idea of a tawdry, handsome, pushing, unscrupulous, vulgar adventuress had, he knew not how, dissolved into the portrait of a quiet, simple, though not well-bred woman, only anxious to exist comfortably, but liable, from credulity or ignorance, to be the tool of some designing man. He regretted that he had been harsh. He suspected she had had hard times with old Travers, and if she had a weakness for some fellow of her own station, could he, Hugh, blame her? Not when he knew how hard a battle he had to fight with himself, though he had a force of all arms, in the shape of self-respect, reason, and resolution, which a poor half-educated timid woman could not be supposed to possess. "I wish I could find her, and know what she is doing. If she has fallen into the hands of a blackguard, it would never do to give him money through her."

"Here you are, sir, Size Lane," cried the cabby, peering down through the square hole at top. "What number, sir?"

"No matter! I will get down here."

Mr. Ford's office was small, but smart and bright with highly polished mahogany, brass, and plate glass. The smell of fresh varnish had not quite vanished. Sir Hugh was asked

to sit down while a clerk took in his card to the private room.

Presently a busy-looking man, with a parcel of papers, came out quickly, and Sir Hugh was asked to walk in. Tall, gaunt, erect, with his ordinary cold, stern expression, Galbraith entered, and found himself face to face with Ford, whom, if he had ever noticed in those distant days, when he used occasionally to visit his cousin's place of business, he was inclined to dislike as a feline kind of man.

Ford was well and accurately dressed, and his room was duly furnished with all the appliances right and proper for the private room of a high-class business man, but he looked very pale, perhaps yellow would be more accurate, very dark and wrinkly about the eyes, while the eyes themselves were painfully glittering and restless.

"Good morning, Mr. Ford."

"Pray be seated, Sir Hugh," he returned, placing himself opposite, and arranging the blotting pad and paper before him with a nervous hurried movement.

"I have called upon you," said Galbraith, dashing into his subject unhesitatingly, "to ask if you can assist me in tracing Mrs. Travers? I understand you knew her and

her family previous to her marriage, and were on terms of some intimacy even after she became your employer's wife."

Ford's pale cheek coloured faintly, and he passed his hand over his mouth to hide the expression he felt come to it at this abrupt speech.

"It is probable," continued Galbraith, "that although you may not know where she is, you may be able to suggest a clue, from your knowledge of her character and habits."

Ford cleared his throat, and thought how he should answer. He was in a mood of bitterest resentment, a resentment half love, half hate, against the object of his devotion. Yet he scarcely liked to lose his last chance with her by aiding her enemy in his search. "Before I make any reply," said he, "allow me to ask your object in seeking her? Having been honoured with her friendship and confidence for some years, I should be extremely sorry to be the means of bringing any trouble or annoyance upon her."

"You do not suppose that I have such intentions towards the widow of my benefactor?" returned Galbraith. "My object is to find out her present position, and furnish her with the means of existing comfortably according

to her original station. But I must see the woman before I make up my mind what to offer."

"I cannot help you, Sir Hugh! For some reason she has chosen to conceal her movements even from me."

"Who knows anything about her?"

"Mr. Reed, a rather self-sufficient young man, connected with the *Morning Thresher*."

"Have you any reason to think that she is married again?"

"No, certainly not!" with a start that overturned a ruler, and gave him occupation in picking it up.

"Do you believe she has gone abroad?"

"I do; I am sure of it."

"Why?"

"Because one of our—I mean your—clerks saw her in a cab with luggage, going towards London Bridge, about a year ago, with this very Reed, just at the time you were put in formal possession; and I have never seen anything of her since."

"Who is the clerk?"

"Poole."

"Poole! Why he was one of the witnesses to the will?"

Ford bowed.

"And you have heard nothing of her since?"

"I will not say that," returned Ford, beginning to think he would like to get the management of this search into his own hands. "I sent a letter of friendly inquiry to her more than a month ago, through Mr. Reed, and not hearing in reply as soon as I expected, I called to ask if it had been sent. Reed assured me it had, and added that he felt certain Mrs. Travers would reply, but that she was much occupied, and would not have leisure just yet; finally she did write, during the Easter recess, which confirms the idea of a school at Wiesbaden."

"It does," said Galbraith thoughtfully. "Did she write fully? What did she say?"

"Not much, but she did mention that the undertaking in which she had embarked was so far prospering. Now the only undertaking she ever mentioned to me was a school."

"Then I am sure Payne's information is correct," exclaimed Galbraith, and forthwith repeated that gentleman's communication. Ford's eyes sparkled.

"There seems a strong probability here," he said. "Were I still in the employment of *Travers and Co.*, I should volunteer to run

over to Wiesbaden, and put the matter beyond dispute. As it is—”

“I could scarcely expect you to leave your business for mine,” put in Sir Hugh. “But, Mr. Ford, I shall endeavour to communicate with Mrs. Travers through this Reed, and should I be unsuccessful, could I not send Poole to ascertain if Mrs. Talboys and Mrs. Travers are identical ?”

“As you please, Sir Hugh,” returned Ford stiffly, “but I need scarcely point out that Poole would be rather a rough ambassador for so delicate and difficult an errand.”

“I do not see much difficulty or delicacy about it !” said Galbraith bluntly. “But I will see Reed if possible. Where is he to be found ?”

“The *Morning Thresher* office, Wellington Street.”

“Thank you,” returned Galbraith, rising. “I shall call on my way back. Good morning ;” and with a haughty bow he took his departure.

The *Morning Thresher* office was, as he remarked, in his westward route, and there he accordingly called, entering for the first time in his life one of the smaller thunder factories, whence issue the electric currents that link

city to city, and unite men in the great commonwealth of thought.

A dingier, dirtier place Galbraith had seldom entered ; there was a long deal counter, where grubby boys in shirt-sleeves were slapping up piles of paper together, and shoving them across to other grubby boys in jacket-sleeves. There was a generally ink-splashed aspect about every one and everything, and when Galbraith asked for Mr. Reed, every one asked every one else if Mr. Reed was in, and finally a thin, pale, seedy young man, with inky fingers, opened a narrow door, much rubbed and marked by hands and shoulders, and ran up a crooked dim ladder-like stair. Coming quickly, clatteringly back, full tilt against the counter, he uttered the single word "Out," adding, with a sharp glance, "any message ?" "My card," said Hugh Galbraith, writing in pencil after his name, "wishes particularly to see Mr. Reed, if he will make an appointment."

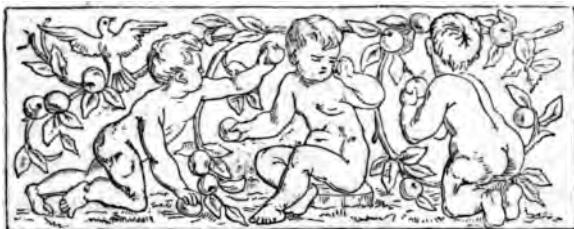
The young man took the card, read it, nodded, and darted upstairs again.

Sir Hugh Galbraith, with a deeper feeling of disgust than ever against the offenders of the press, left the office, re-entered his cab, and drove away to the club.

It was now three o'clock, and the butterflies were beginning to come out; carriages were beginning to gather at the doors of Waterloo House, and Howell and James's. The steps of the National Gallery were sprinkled with gaily-attired visitors ascending and descending, for the R. A. Exhibition was open, and as Galbraith drove past he saw a well-dressed, good-looking young man, with a bouquet in his button-hole, and a grey kid-gloved hand, resting on the door handle of an admirably-appointed brougham, while he laughed and talked with evident familiarity to a handsome woman, who sat arrayed in all her glory within.

Sir Hugh leant forward and gazed eagerly at him, then, throwing himself back with a sort of indignant astonishment, he exclaimed aloud—

“By Jove! it’s Tom.”



CHAPTER XI.

THE first two or three weeks succeeding Hugh Galbraith's departure were very dull and uninteresting, as Fanny openly declared ; but all her dexterity failed to draw any expression from her friend and partner, beyond an exclamation that she was very glad he was gone. Business was rather quiet too, and, in short, the friends had to pass through one of those dull periods—which will come now and then—when the wheels of life have slackened speed, or come to a standstill, till some unforeseen circumstance happens to screw them up to full working condition again.

Nevertheless, Kate Travers was conscious

that she missed the exciting antagonism of Galbraith's presence, although sincerely thankful that he had departed without any attempt to express the admiration which he had been betrayed into displaying. In truth, she was vexed with herself for the part she had played, or rather into which she had drifted, with no specially-defined purpose.

When first she found her enemy within her gates, the temptation to revenge herself for his expressions of contempt towards her by proving that her attractions were not to be despised, was irresistible ; but she never contemplated anything serious arising out of her little game. To charm her guest, while holding him in check by her own well-bred indifference and self-possession, was the utmost she aimed at ; to make her mark, in short, so that, when the *dénouement* came, her husband's insolent kinsman should acknowledge that he had in every way met his match. She did not, however, calculate on the material with which she had to deal being different from what she had expected. There was an odd sort of power in the very simplicity of Galbraith's character. His wants were few, but he knew what he wanted. He was by no means intellectual, according to Kate's stand-

ard, but then his decisions were never swayed and unsteadied by seeing two or three sides to a question. He was evidently a soldier by nature—prompt to deal with what he could see and grasp, and utterly intolerant of all opposition that might weaken or retard his plan of life's campaign, which, to do him justice, was never conceived without a certain regard to the right of others as *he* saw them. He was an aristocrat without being a fine gentleman, and the full recognition of herself as a gentlewoman, which every word, and look, and tone of his accorded, was very conciliating.

There was something, too, that appealed to the chivalry of her nature in the boyish transparency of his admiration, mute though it was. She would have blushed to have hurried him, by word or glance, into any avowal he would have regretted; but she was too thoughtful an observer not to see that he was strong enough to be master of himself; and that if he could not quite conceal the feelings she inspired, neither would he be betrayed into expressing them when they could not be addressed to her as to a woman he would seek to wed. She felt certain of his respect, *but* she had been greatly startled by his

momentary loss of self-control. The passion betrayed by his eyes—by his gesture—was a revelation of something that might be beyond her management—something that might give him more pain than she would like to inflict, even on her enemy, especially as it was her mission to rob him of his newly-found fortune. Not altogether ! She would deal generously by Sir Hugh Galbraith, and not let him know who dealt the blow till all was settled ! So strong was her anticipation of triumph that she almost shrunk from thinking of the bitter mortification she was destined to heap upon him. “How desperately he will hate me !” she thought. “That cannot be helped ; but I am very glad he is gone ! After all, I may have to pass my life selling wools and canvas, while he may soar away to political regions, and add one more timber to the heads that shore up the obstructions of Toryism. Hugh Galbraith would be a grand acquisition to a party. His sense of discipline would keep him steady to any chief who on the whole carried out his views. He would never split straws, and he would be as true as steel ! Won’t he despise me when he knows I have passed myself off to him under false colours ! Great, stupid, honest fellow !

What do I care?—he will never cross me again!"

From these vague reflections and dreams of possible triumph Kate was rather unpleasantly roused by news from Tom. "Gregory sails to-morrow," he wrote, "for the Cape and Natal. It is well we got his affidavit in time. It would have been better if we could have produced the man, should you ever be able to make out a case for counsel. I was rather startled by finding the enclosed card on my table a few days ago. I must not meet Galbraith! for I have a strong suspicion he saw me when I was last at Pierstoffe, and of course he would immediately guess the identity of his fascinating landlady. I therefore wrote a polite note, stating that I was overwhelmed with work, but would be most happy to answer any written communication. High presto! I received a short, sharp, decisive array of questions: but I enclose you the production. My answer distinctly says, 'I am Mrs. Travers's trusted friend, and I will neither write nor speak a syllable that can betray the incognito she chooses to preserve.' Ford called here since I wrote, but I did not see him. I feel greatly disgusted with everything to-day, especially myself. There is a

report that Pennington is better, and may return to his duties here. Upon my soul I *cannot* rejoice, and yet he is such a good fellow."

There was also a long epistle to Fanny, over which she looked a little grave. At tea she confessed she had a bad headache, and thought she would put on her hat and take a stroll along the North Parade.

"Do," said Mrs. Temple; "and as soon as I can leave I will come and join you."

It was Saturday evening, and it had been a busy day. Kate felt very tired, or rather weary; she had worked without spirit, and was in that sort of mood when even so slight a check as the not unforeseen departure of an unimportant witness appeared a mountain of misfortune.

Kate felt unusually bitter and implacable towards Galbraith. She had seen a paragraph in one of the London papers in which a report was noticed that Sir Hugh Galbraith of Kirby Grange would probably offer himself to the electors of Middleburgh, in the neighbourhood of which he had nearly completed the purchase of a large property formerly belonging to his family, &c., &c. So! with her money he was building up a position of power and prominence, while she was spending her

days in gathering up a bare means of existence from the obscure population of a little out-of-the-way corner. Was it to be always like this? Would the queen never have her own again? Was it her fate to be walked over? Where! where could she turn to find munitions of war, the evidence which she felt certain must exist, and which would furnish the basis of her operations? Where could she turn? Why was Tom so distrustful of that man Trapes? Tom was lukewarm, because he was unbelieving. She felt on fire with indignant impatience. Next week she would go up to town to make purchases for her shop, and then, Tom or no Tom, she would manage to see Trapes, and find out what connection existed between him and Ford.

But although she was feverish and depressed, Mrs. Temple's customers were not the worse or more impatiently served, and when at last she summoned the errand boy to put up the shutters the fair widow had done a fair day's business, and felt she had earned an evening stroll.

The soft summer darkness of a May evening was beginning to fold its wings over sea and sky as she sallied forth, and drank in with an unutterable feeling of relief and refreshment

the delicious balmy, briny air. She paused upon the slip to enjoy it to the full, when to her surprise she saw Fanny hastening towards her.

“ Returning already ?” exclaimed Mrs. Temple.

“ I shall not, now you are here,” said Fanny, who seemed ruffled ; “ but it’s too bad ; one cannot sit down in peace by the sad sea waves——”

“ What has happened ?”

“ Oh, that goose, Turner junior, came and sat down by me and made a scene.”

“ A scene ? How ?”

“ Oh, he said great nonsense ; that I was the ocean to the river of his thoughts ; that I would yet regret my disregard of a blighted but devoted heart. That he knew he had rivals—a favoured rival!—but that he would seek oblivion in the poisoned bowl of pleasure, and a lot more. He quite frightened me ; but I fancied I perceived an odour of brandy-and-water about him, so I plucked up courage to say I was very sorry to vex him, but that I couldn’t help being engaged, and that I was quite sure he would meet somebody he would like much better by-and-by. Then he jumped up and desired me not

to speak in that way unless I wished to see him a mangled corse at my feet. I just said I wished nothing of the kind, and ran right away. Did you ever know anything so stupid and provoking?"

"It is very," said Kate, sympathisingly. "But you know, Fanny, I always warned you not to trifle with that young man, and I think you have—a little."

"No, indeed, I have not. I never thought he was in earnest. I don't think he was now. I do not think he was sober. He will go away and forget all about it—only we will not tell Tom!"

"Yes, you had better; everything in the world comes out some time; and let Tom hear the first of everything from yourself, I would advise you."

Fanny passed her arm through her friend's, and they strolled on in silence. At last Fanny exclaimed, "I believe the world would be happier and better without men; don't you think so, Kate?"

"Certainly not, Fanny; and you would be the last to like such a world. Imagine the world without Tom!"

"Oh, I should have excepted him; but see what mischief and trouble Mr. Travers, and

Sir Hugh Galbraith, and little Mr. Turner make."

"True enough—and Captain Gregory. Tom says he is obliged to go to sea again." Mrs. Temple recapitulated the contents of Tom's letter, and the friends strolled to and fro discussing it, and the possibility of Tom encountering Galbraith. "I trust they may not meet till the game is played out," said Mrs. Temple; "but I confess, Fanny, I feel greatly cast down. I do not catch a gleam of light on any side. Is it possible that I must live on always under this cloud, and never be able to assert myself? I confess that to drag out all my life in social obscurity never entered into my plans. Fan, do you think you could manage the shop for a week, if I find I want to stay so long when I go up to town? for I am determined to utilise my visit to London when I go."

"Of course I could manage it," cried Fanny readily; "I am not half such an ignoramus as I was, and I have got over my dread of Lady Styles. Indeed, she does not bother me half so much as she did at first. You may go, dear; and you shall see what a heap of money I shall make in your absence. When shall you go?"

“Oh, in about a fortnight ; that will give me time to have everything arranged by the time the season here really sets in.”

Their talk flowed on, sometimes broken by pauses of thought, but always with a pleasant confidence and oneness of purpose.

“How beautiful the stars look,” exclaimed Fanny, as they turned at last to go in. “I wonder if they are really worlds, and have people in them, and if they can look down and know what the people here are doing ? How they could astonish us if they sent down electric information.”

“I would ask what is the connection, if any, between Mr. Ford and that man Trapes ; and you would inquire about Tom, I suppose ?”

“No, I should not,” cried Fanny ; “it would be mean, and, besides, I know he is all right. No ; but I should like to know what Sir Hugh is about ; broiling at some grand dinner, I dare say, looking as cross as the cats, and as solemn as an owl. Couldn’t he look cross, Kate ?”

“Stern and forbidding, not cross.”

“I daresay he often wishes himself back at Pierstoffer, whatever he is doing.”

Could Fanny’s wish have been granted, she would, no doubt, have been greatly surprised.

The purchase of the Galbraith property had been brought to a successful termination, and Sir Hugh determined to give himself a holiday from the crowd, the rush, the perpetual round of unimportant nothings which made up the sum of town life. He would away, and refresh himself by a breath of the free moorland breeze; a glimpse of the bold craggy cliffs with their border of ceaseless foam, and setting of wide, green-blue sea. So, desiring his servant to put up what was necessary for a few days, he started without beat of drum on this same Saturday for the Great Northern Station with the intention of catching a train that started about six, and got into Middleburgh—the nearest point to his destination he could reach by rail—about eleven.

On his arrival, however, he found the time-table had been altered, and the six o'clock train now started at 5.45. He was, therefore, just in time to be late.

"What a—blank, blank—nuisance ! When is the next train ?"

"Seven, sir."

"And I suppose that creeps along all night?"

"It's a fast train as far as Stoneborough, sir ; after that it stops at a goodish few stations."

"It's fast to Stoneborough, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

Galbraith stood a moment in thought, and then began to walk up and down thinking, while the words "Fast to Stoneborough" seemed at once to embody all his wishes. It would be a far better, pleasanter place to spend Sunday in than London. There was a fine country round. He could get a trap and drive over to Weston and see Lady Styles. Pshaw! Why not to Pierstoffer and visit Mrs. Temple and pretty little Fanny? The idea presented itself with a flood of delight. To be once more in what had been the only homelike dwelling he had ever enjoyed! To hear Kate's low voice—to look into her eyes, and puzzle himself once more over the possible interpretation of their language, even though the solution was unflattering! To be near her once more; be the risk what it might, he would risk it. Besides, he had himself better in hand now; he would make it just a friendly visit—to show her he had not forgotten them—and—but could he trust his self-control? No matter whether he could or could not, *nothing* should keep him back from that hour of happiness for which his soul thirsted!

If Mrs. Temple would only tell him her

history, and that history contained no passage derogatory to character, nothing his wife would blush to own, why should he not marry her? Whatever her origin, she was a gentlewoman; and so was Miss Lee. But this was absurd. He was only going to pay a friendly visit and get over Sunday.

With the help of a cigar, a glass of brandy and soda, and a good deal of walking up and down, Galbraith passed the time of waiting, and started for Stoneborough about an hour before Fanny Lee hazarded the conjectures respecting him recorded above.

Sunday was a calm, grey day, more like autumn than spring; and after their early dinner Fanny undertook to give Mrs. Mills a nice long walk, for Mills's life was a little lonely. A walk with her mistress or "Miss Fanny" was one of her treats; and the old lady was still strong and active. Mrs. Temple was glad to stay at home and alone. It was often a help to her to think things through—to reason herself out of her depressed moods—to seek counsel with her own heart; and she was vexed with herself for the fretful unrest that had of late taken hold of her. Arming herself with a favourite volume of

Carlyle's poetic weird eloquence, she sat down in a low chair by the open window and gazed out on the prettily-grouped flower-beds, sweet with mignonette and heliotrope, and gay with verbenas. It was very still ; so still that the soft dash of the waves, hushed by distance, came sleepily to her ear, and made her thoughts dreamy instead of distinct and consecutive.

"What an eternal effort life is," she thought ; "a struggle for existence, and with existence ; with material circumstances outside, and rebellion and treachery within !"

"All things have rest : why should we toil alone ?
We only toil, who are the first of things,
And make perpetual moan,
Still from one sorrow to another thrown :
Nor ever fold our wings,
And cease from wanderings——"

The door opening suddenly startled her from her recollections of Tennyson. Sarah in a Sunday frock and smiling aspect appeared. "Here's the gentleman, ma'am," she said ; whereupon Galbraith, hat in hand, walked in.

"Hugh Galbraith !" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, thrown too much off her guard by extreme surprise to notice her own speech, and holding out her hand before she had time to collect herself.

"Yes!" returned he, gathering it up into a tight, feverish grasp for an instant, and speaking quickly. "I am on my way to the north, stopping till to-morrow at Stoneborough; so I just drove over to ask how you and Miss Lee are—and—. How is Miss Lee?" Letting Mrs. Temple's hand go and taking a chair opposite to her, his usually sombre eyes all aglow, the lines of his somewhat harsh face softened and relaxed as he gazed once more on the eyes, the lips, the brow, which he had never quite succeeded in banishing from his mental sight.

"She is quite well," said Mrs. Temple, smiling in spite of herself, though she was quite as much annoyed as she was amused by her enemy's unexpected reappearance.

"Is she at home?" asked Galbraith, who seemed deeply interested in Fanny's movements.

"No; she has gone to walk with Miss Mills."

"Oh, indeed!" with a hearty inward thanksgiving. "And I hope Mills is all right; she is a capital nurse!"

"Quite well, thank you."

There was an awkward pause, which Mrs. Temple mercifully broke by asking politely,—

“And you yourself, Sir Hugh Galbraith, I hope you are now quite restored? I see you have discarded your sling.”

“Yes, thank you, I am quite recovered; but I do not feel the same in London as here. It’s such a rackety, unnatural sort of place. I don’t seem able to breathe there; so I am going down to Kirby Grange—an old place of mine, I think I mentioned to you. Haven’t been there for years.”

“I daresay the change will do you good,” said Kate blandly, but coldly. “I see there is some mention of your standing for Middleburgh.”

“Yes, if I give up the army. I must do something; and—”

Galbraith forgot what he was going to say, for Mrs. Temple had lifted up her eyes to his with an unusual amount of interest.

“And you will, of course, go into the House as an obstructive,” said she with a smile, filling up his pause.

“Exactly,” he returned. “I shall be very glad to act as a drag on the wheel, to keep the state machine from going too fast down hill.”

“Or up hill,” she added.

“I suppose Pierstoffer is going on just as

usual?" resumed Galbraith, who found this effort to talk on indifferent topics desperately hard work.

"Just the same. We are anticipating a brilliant season, and Lady Styles informs me there is really a good set of people coming. Now a 'good set' for me, means people inclined to invest largely in Berlin wool and embroidery cotton, but I am afraid the possession of ready money somehow does not seem to exercise a refining influence."

Galbraith got up and walked to the window.

"How sweet and fresh your garden is. What a relief it is to be here again! Do you know, I never felt so comfortable and at home as in your house."

"I am pleased to hear it."

Another awkward pause, and he broke out with, "You remember that property you wrote about for me? Well, I have bought it, and am now on my way to have a look at it." As he said this their eyes met, and at the same moment the recollection of the episode which concluded their last interview flashed upon them both; the yearning passionate look came back to Galbraith's eyes, and in spite of her cool self-possession Mrs. Temple's cheek grew crimson.

"I wanted to beg your pardon for that piece of presumption," exclaimed Galbraith, answering the blush, "and you would not see me! I know it was wrong; but, I declare to Heaven, I could not help it!"

"Pray say no more," said Mrs. Temple, in a low tone, and rising with a vague notion of making her escape. "It was a piece of folly better forgotten. I will not remember it—pray put it out of your head!"

"I cannot!" returned Galbraith, unconsciously placing himself between her and the door—"I cannot! and your look of displeasure is always before me! Of course you were angry! but if you think I meant anything disrespectful, you are very much mistaken; my feelings for you are more like worship than disrespect!" and Galbraith pulled himself up with a short scornful laugh at his own imbecility in thus betraying himself to so indifferent a listener, and yet the surprise and embarrassment of the moment brought a varying colour to Kate's cheek—a tremor to her voice—a something soft and deprecatory to her manner, that completed the spell. Galbraith did not exactly lose his head, but experienced the kind of intoxication which new and strong emotion suddenly exercises on a

man whose passions have hitherto slumbered, urging his brain to greater activity, and his will to daring deeds, often resulting in success, such as he would never have attained in complete sobriety of mind. He now stood still, his shoulder against the window-frame, all hesitation and reserve gone, his eyes fixed tenderly yet defiantly upon his companion.

“ You astonish and distress me ! ” said Mrs. Temple, hesitatingly. “ I beg you will not talk in such a strain ! You must know”—gathering firmness as she proceeded—“ you must know that such words from a man in your position to a woman in mine mean—well, certainly not respect ! I wish you would still let me think well of you, and go away.”

“ Why do you refuse to hear me ? What have I done to make you dislike me ? The first moment I ever saw you, you looked as if you could murder me ! I wish to Heaven you would tell me your history ! You might. I am certain there is nothing in it you need be ashamed of.”

“ This is, indeed, presuming too far ! What right have you to ask such a question ? ” said Kate, turning very pale.

“ The right that loving you as I never

thought I could love, gives"—cried Galbraith coming a step nearer—"give me the right ! Will you be my wife, Mrs. Temple ?"

This point-blank question seemed suddenly to restore Kate's self-command. "No, Sir Hugh Galbraith, I will not !" she replied, uncompromisingly, and there was a moment's silence, Galbraith looking fixedly at her.

"I suppose," he resumed, "I ought to be satisfied, and go away ! I know I am not a loveable sort of fellow ! I don't believe any one ever cared a straw for me ; but I should like to know your special objections ?"

"I have no special objections. You have always behaved well and kindly while in my house," returned Kate, a little touched by his unexpected humility ; "but I am the last woman in the world you ought to think of ! Believe me this is a whim, for which, were I fool enough to accept you, you would soon think you had paid too high a price !"

"You are mistaken, Kate."

"I am not, Sir Hugh ! Your voice said as much just now, when you asked me what *might* have been a fatal question for you ! Besides, we are unlike in habits, opinions, and antecedents. Let us forget all about this temporary insanity"—smiling pleasantly,

and trying to give a lighter tone to the conversation—"do not fancy you are not loveable because I do not love you in the way you want. I hate having to speak so ungraciously," interrupting herself with a sweet frankness terribly trying to her hearer. "You will find plenty of women of your own grade who will love you—and make you very happy ; and let us forget all about this !"

" You said that hearty gratitude was no bad substitute for love," said Galbraith, gloomily, walking slowly towards the door and back again. " Not that you would have anything to be grateful to me for ; but you once married for a home ! Am I such a disagreeable fellow that a miserable shop is preferable to a comfortable home if I shared it ?"

" And *you* said, if I remember right, that if your wife did not love you as warmly as you loved her, your would put an end to yourself !"

" Better half a loaf than no bread !" exclaimed Galbraith. " Give me your friendship—your confidence, to begin with, and let me try to win the rest !"

" Pray, pray say no more !" said Kate, greatly surprised and moved at his perseve-

rance. “ You grieve me beyond measure. It is quite impossible that you and I ever could be anything to each other, even friends! Do leave me. I am not ungrateful for the feelings you express. I am so sorry to cause you pain ; but, indeed, it is utterly impossible for us to be even friends.”

She held out her hand to him, and, to his decided gratification, he observed her eyes were full of tears. However, he drew himself up a little stiffly.

“ Forgive me, Mrs. Temple. It would be unmanly to intrude any longer upon you ; though we must not be friends, I trust we shall never be enemies.”

He took her hand as he spoke—at first gently, but with a tightening grasp, looking into her eyes, and then laying his other hand over the one he held.

“ I hope not,” she replied, falteringly ; “ but what will be, will be.”

“ I shall never be *your* enemy, at all events,” continued Galbraith, still holding her hand ; “ so good-bye, Kate ! I will do my best to forget you. Though you are the only woman in the world to me *now*, I will not be such a poltroon as to let you spoil my life !”

“ God forbid !” said she. “ I trust there is

plenty of work, and love, and happiness before you ! Life can give nothing better."

Galbraith made no reply. Pressing her hand hard, and releasing it so suddenly as to have almost the effect of throwing it from him, he turned and left the room. The next moment Kate heard the front door shut hastily.

The most extreme surprise—the most sincere regret—were Kate's only distinct sensations as she ran hastily to her own room to recover herself before Fanny's return.

She thought she could perceive that Galbraith had allowed himself to be hurried into one unguarded speech after another until he felt compelled to make all consistent by asking her to be his wife. She had certainly said or done nothing to lead him on, and he had seemed painfully in earnest. He would get over his fancy for her, of course. Men are, fortunately for themselves, seldom constant; but there was a certain intensity about Galbraith's nature that was likely to render all struggles severe to him. And then the future—what mortification it would be her lot to heap upon this man, who, whatever he might be, had certainly offered himself and his whole life to her. She absolutely contemplated the

idea of her own possible success with a shudder. She had wished that his life should have plenty of love and happiness. Where was it to come from if she was to reduce him to poverty and to debt ? for how could he ever refund the ten thousand pounds he had taken from her property ? She was quite ready to deal generously by him ; but how would he like to be always in her debt ? And yet she must go on ; she must disprove that will, be the consequence what it might. “ How I wish Hugh Galbraith had never come here ! How I wish he had been in England when I was married first ! Had he known me all through he would not have despised me so much, and things might have come right ;” but with this reflection came a sudden thought that made her heart beat for a moment—a consciousness that if she had known Hugh Galbraith before her marriage, neither poverty nor loneliness would have driven her to be Mr. Travers’s wife. Not, she thought, that she felt any tendency to reciprocate his feelings, but the interview she had just had seemed to have revealed what love was—what it might be to herself—more than all the volumes of poetry and romance she had ever *read.*

Well, that episode was over, and it was not likely that Hugh Galbraith and herself should ever meet again. He would, no doubt, keep out of her way. If so, then why need he ever know that Kate Temple and Catherine Travers were identical? Then he need never be mortified by knowing he was under obligations to the woman who had refused him. And she need not be lowered in his estimation as having played the part of a traitor—written his letters, and let him confide in her and love her—she! his enemy.

“I daresay he will marry somebody soon, and then if it is some commonplace fine lady, how will it be for Hugh when the trouble comes? I really must ask Tom to give him some notice that I don’t intend to keep quiet always, just to rouse him from his security —Alas! what chance have I really of the success I dream about? According to Tom, none whatever. It is all very puzzling!”

Fanny’s wonder and exclamations and conjectures may be imagined when she heard of Sir Hugh’s visit. She bitterly regretted her own absence when she found that no satisfactory information was to be extracted from Mrs. Temple. “Had I been here I could

have seen with half an eye what had brought him back."

After this somewhat painful break in the routine of her life Mrs. Temple and Fanny settled once more into the ordinary course of their existence, sold their goods, and balanced their books, undisturbed even by Turner junior, who disappeared at intervals. Gossip said he had been seen at the Stoneborough races, and other scenes of wild dissipation. He was certainly absent during the Derby week, and Mrs. Turner reported the "governor" as "that cross" there was no doing anything with him.

Miss Fanny, too, had her sip at the bowl of pleasure (poison omitted). Kate and Tom Reed had contrived three glorious days for her in London. A married sister of Tom's had come up from Devonshire with her husband to see the horse show, and she was very pleased to have their pretty little relative (who cost them nothing) for a guest. She only knew that she was employed in some capacity by a Mrs. Temple, and shrewdly suspected she was to be Mrs. Tom Reed. But Tom, from having been the object of headshakings and lugubrious prophecy, had progressed into "a fine young fellow that may be

in Parliament one of these days," and with his choice no sister dared to interfere. So Fanny saw *the play* and the pictures, and had some charming *tête-à-tête* walks in the park, and so returned refreshed to her daily labour. Mrs. Temple had run up to town also, but only on business, and her visit was more wearisome than refreshing.

The Pierstoffs season had now set in, and the rooms erst occupied by Hugh Galbraith were tenanted by an elderly couple, recommended by Lady Styles, who were very fidgety and exceedingly economical. Still Mrs. Temple preferred them to single gentlemen, whom from henceforth she renounced. And so a fine glowing August was drawing quickly—with the quickness of monotony—to its close, when one Wednesday evening, without notice of any kind, Tom Reed made his appearance.

His tidings shall be told in due order.



CHAPTER XII.

QUE evening, as Tom Reed was leaving the theatre, after escorting some country acquaintances to witness the performance, he was tapped on the shoulder. This operation had no terrors for Tom, so he turned calmly round and was greeted by a young man somewhat older than himself, attired in a sporting style, with his hat on one side and a red and yellow tie. The face was at once strange, yet familiar, and Tom had to think a moment before he exclaimed, "Poole?"

"The same, sir."

"Well, Mr. Poole?"

"Well, sir, I believe you are a lawyer, and

I want a bit of advice. Might I be so bold as to call on you anywhere?"

Tom felt inclined to d—n his impudence, but there was a queer, good-humoured, good-natured expression about the man's face that attracted Tom's fancy—and, then he was one of the witnesses to the will, and it would be as well to get hold of him.

"I am neither a solicitor nor a practising barrister," said Reed, smiling ; " still, if I can give you any help I will. Call at the *Morning Thresher* office, Wellington Street, any day between two and three, and I will try and see you, but I am a good deal engaged."

"Thank you ! I will," returned the other ; "and—I beg your pardon for keeping you, Mr. Reed—but I hope Mrs. Travers is well ? She *was* a real lady !—always had a kind, civil word for a chap. She always brought me up to time, when I used to be in an awful funk going to old Travers. Lord, what a hard-mouthed old buffer he was!"

"Mrs. Travers was quite well when I last heard of her."

"I am told she is away on the Continent?"

"So I am told," returned Tom.

"Well, I'll look in the first day I can, Mr. Reed."

“All right.”

They parted ; and several days elapsed before Poole made his appearance. Tom had almost forgotten the interview, when one Saturday afternoon he had been detained longer than usual, and was on the point of leaving the office, when a crushed piece of paper with the words “William Poole” written in a fine clerkly hand upon it was brought to him.

“If you can give me a few minutes, Mr. Reed,” began Poole, after they had exchanged greetings, “I’ll be awfully obliged.”

“I am at your service for the next half hour,” said Tom Reed, with his usual cheerful good nature ; “after that I have engagements.”

“I intended calling here last week, but times are changed at Travers’s. We used to be kept pretty well up to the collar in the old gentleman’s day, but we are near driven to death since the new manager came.”

“You have a new manager?”

“Yes ; you know Ford would not stay on, though Sir Hugh Galbraith gave him the legacy that had been left him in the first will, after he had had the books and everything examined by a regular accountant. Ford was in high

favour for a while, but I suppose he saw his way to a more independent position, for he gave up his situation, and I believe Sir Hugh took our present manager on his recommendation. I think he might have said a good word for me, but he didn't. He was always a conceited chap ; didn't think small potatoes of himself, *I* can tell you. Lord ! how he hated old Gregory ; and the jealousy of him, if Mr. Travers spoke a civil word to any one.—But I am taking up your time, Mr. Reed. Now, what I wanted to ask you about was a man of the name of Trapes. He says he has known you for years ; in short, that you are an old pal of his."

"I certainly have known Mr. Trapes for a long time," returned Reed, "but I have seen very little of him since the first couple of years I was in London. He has gone to the bad terribly, poor fellow ! I wouldn't have too much to say to him, if I were you."

"I have had quite enough, I can tell you!" said Poole, shaking his head. "Why, he owes me a pot of money ! There is lots I will never get back ; but I want you to tell me if this I O U," dragging out a much-rubbed pocket-book, and extracting a piece of bluish paper from its depths, "is of any use ? You

see, it is nearly two years and a half after date."

"Why have you let it lie over so long?" said Reed, taking the paper. "Hum"—a quickly suppressed look of surprise and interest gleamed in his face as he perused it. Then, raising his eyebrows, he looked keenly and steadily at Poole. "I see it is dated the 10th of March, 18—? Under what circumstances did Trapes give this to you?"

"Well, we were together at the Reepham Steeplechase, and Trapes had won and lost a lot of money. I had been rather lucky; but when we came to start for town he hadn't a rap, so he persuaded me to lend him five pound ten. He owed me six besides, so he said, in his dashing way, 'Come, I'll write you an I O U for twelve, and that will pay a couple of weeks' interest.' But I have never seen any more of the money from that day to this."

"And where is Reepham?" asked Tom, still holding the paper.

"Oh, in S——shire, a couple of hours from town by rail, and another by 'bus."

"Did he give you this before you left?"

"He did. We were just having a 'go' of gin-and-water before starting, and the barmaid

gave us pen, ink, and paper ; he wrote it out, and I gave him the cash then and there. I was very green in those days."

"Then I suppose this is the date on which you lent the money ?"

"Yes, of course."

"Why do you think of using it now ?"

"Because that fellow Trapes seems quite flush of cash. You never saw such a swell as he is come out ! but he is an impudent blackguard, and scarcely ever sober. He was d—d impertinent to my wife and me, Mr. Reed (I was married last autumn), at the London Bridge Railway Station, when we were going to Greenwich last Saturday. You would think he was a lord. So I will have my money if it is possible. You see, Mr. Reed, now I have responsibilities I must turn over a new leaf, so I thought I would ask your advice, because you knew this man ; and besides, if I went to a stranger on a matter of business, one would have to pay through the nose for advice," added Poole, candidly.

"And how did you manage to get away from the office for a whole day for this steeple-chase ?" asked Tom, who had been thinking deeply, and scarcely seemed to have heard Poole speak.

“ Well, it was not an easy matter ; but, you see, I was taken with a bad headache and faintness the day before,” returned Poole with a wink. “ As Ford was away—gone to bury his father, or his mother, or both of ‘em—I got off. Mr. Travers was not a hard chap when you got the right side of him.”

“ Oh, he was going to the office then ?”

“ Yes ; and for a couple of months after. It was shortly before he went down to Hampton Court.”

“ Then it was about the time you witnessed that unlucky will ?”

“ Ay, so it must have been.”

“ Was it before or after you witnessed it ?”

“ Well, I am not sure—after, I think. Why ?”

“ Nothing ; only I cannot help thinking what a rascally will it is. If poor Mrs. Travers had continued the head of the house you would probably be in a better position.”

“ I don’t know that,” returned Poole. “ It’s the head clerk, not the head of the house, that gives you a lift. But, be that as it may, I was always sorry for Mrs. Travers.”

“ Look here, Poole,” said Tom; suddenly rising, “ I cannot let you stay any longer now ; but leave me this,” holding up the paper. “ I

will take care of it, though it has no legal value. I will see Trapes, and try what is to be done with him. You shall hear from me in a few days."

"Thank you, Mr. Reed," returned Poole, rising with alacrity. "If you take it in hand, you will make something of it; and I can tell you, twelve pounds is no joke to a married man."

"Or to an unmarried one either," said Tom gaily, as he opened the door for him.

The moment he was gone, Tom turned to the table where the I O U lay, and seizing it, exclaimed almost aloud, "By George! she is right, after all! There must have been some roguery at work! If Poole was away all day at a steeplechase on the 10th of March, it is clear he could not have witnessed Mr. Travers's will. Yet he was ready to swear to his own signature! I wonder he never noticed the date; but I daresay the steeplechase had gone out of his head by that time. It is the necessity for money that has made him think of this I O U, and recalled the circumstance to his mind. Not a word of this must get out till I have secured Trapes's corroborating evidence. After all, Mrs. Travers's conjecture

that there is some link between Ford and this man may prove true."

So thinking, Tom carefully folded up the paper and placed it in a strong box for present safety, and then went on his way rejoicing.

Kate Travers had met her reverse with a gallant spirit, but he knew well the bitter mortification with which that reverse had been fraught. The loss of money was as nothing, compared to the humiliating effect produced by the sort of legal declaration of her husband through his will, that she deserved nothing—and that, too, from a man so remarkable for strict justice and profound sense of duty. True, she did not believe he had been guilty of doing her such a wrong, but the world did. And what an occasion was thus given to her contemptuous enemy to blaspheme!

Tom's honest heart glowed at the idea of her possible triumph; but, though far from a profound lawyer, he knew it was a difficult task to upset a will, and he resolved not to disturb Kate's present quiet until he could offer some more tangible groundwork of hope than the present faint spark of light.

Of course Trapes was away, or did not

choose to respond, or was laid up with D. T. Whatever was the reason, he took no notice of Tom's note, requesting him to call, for fully ten days, and then he did not come at the right time ; so Mr. Reed was out, and Trapes afforded the grimy boys, attendant imps of the office, a good deal of amusement by swaggering considerably, and professing himself unable to understand what Mr. Reed meant by being out of the way when he had asked him (Mr. Trapes) to call.

On that very day Tom had business in the City, and turning the corner of Lombard Street he came upon Mr. Ford, who seemed eager to speak to him, and as soon as they had exchanged salutations, asked if there was any news of Mrs. Travers.

“ Nothing new,” replied Tom.

“ She does not talk of coming to England ?” asked Ford.

“ How do you know she is out of it ?” was Tom Reed's counter-question.

“ Will you say positively that she is not ?”

“ No ; I will commit myself to nothing.”

“ At any rate, her reply to me seems to have been three days on the road.”

“ I assure you I lost no time in forwarding it.”

"Very likely."

"Well, I suppose [she told you all about herself?]"

"All about herself?" returned Ford, with a sneer. "I presume you know how much. I daresay the polite epistle was sent open for your inspection!"

"It was nothing of the kind!" cried Reed with some warmth.

"Will you step into my office, Mr. Reed?" said Ford after a moment's pause, and regaining his self-possession. "I should much like a little conversation with you."

"Very well," replied Tom. "I have a few minutes to spare, and they are at your service."

Ford led the way in silence through the roar and rush of the great tideway. His office was close at hand, and the well-appointed private room soon reached.

Here Ford began to unburden himself; he was evidently in a curious, restless, excited, indignant mood. He began by stating that, considering the true friendship he had ever testified towards Mrs. Travers, he considered that he had met with decided ingratitude.

"No one, Mr. Reed, ever made more sacrifices than I did; for if you knew the terms

on which I was received, both by herself and that excellent lady her late mother, you would understand how trying the change that ensued. When in former times I used to go down with letters and papers to Mr. Travers, I was permitted, nay, encouraged, to assist in pruning the fruit-trees and tying up the roses. My opinion was asked and my advice taken. I will not pretend to you, Mr. Reed, that this constant intercourse with a charming young lady—not, after all, so very much my junior—was without its effect. Feelings began to arise in my heart which I flattered myself were neither unperceived nor unacceptable, when suddenly the intelligence of the mother's death, of the approaching marriage of Mr. Travers with the object of my own wishes, came upon me like an avalanche."

Mr. Ford paused and wiped his brow; while Tom, his face composed to an expression of solemn sympathy, sat listening, and inwardly wondering at this strange confession; marvelling that the every-day good sense of a shrewd business-man did not show him the great gulf at all times yawning between him and such a creature as Mrs. Travers—

"O, wad some power the giftie gie us,
To see oursel's as others see us!"

—Perhaps it is better that the powers are merciful.

"It was my impulse to quit a post so calculated to embitter my existence, and embark in the line I have now adopted," resumed Ford, clearing his voice with a portentous "hem!" "but an expression of Mrs. Travers's prevented me—an expression which, no doubt, she would tell you she could not recall to her mind. She said, when we first met after her ill-starred marriage, 'I am glad to see you, Mr. Ford. I trust you will be my right hand as well as Mr. Travers's, for we are old friends, you know.' From which I understood her to mean that she relied on my sympathy and assistance in the difficulties with which she already found her married life bristling. The words were enough for me; I effaced myself and remained."

"I am sure she always had the greatest respect for you," said Tom Reed, seeing he paused for a reply.

Ford laughed bitterly. "Yes, I stayed on, to be made use of, to do what I could to shield her from the whims and ill-tempers

of ‘my employer,’ as that conceited beast Sir Hugh Galbraith called him ; and she always spoke to me so softly and courteously I thought she recognized the spirit that actuated me. But [from the hour of Travers’s death, sir,” he continued with increasing vehemence, “she changed in a thousand delicate, undefinable, unmistakable ways ; she made me feel that I was the employed and she the employer. The very tone in which she promised me advancement as a faithful servant was intolerable. I confess I did not deserve this ; yet the pain of finding that will, the agony of putting it into her hands, was almost more than I could bear ; and from that moment she threw off the mask. She showed the dislike I inspired—dislike, no doubt, arising from the fact of my knowing the humble position from which Mr. Travers had raised her.”

Ford paused, out of breath from his own excitement.

“I cannot help thinking you do her injustice, Mr. Ford. In the matter of feeling, one is so apt to be mistaken. She may have appreciated you without actually reciprocating your feelings, and you must grant that, however sincere her regard and respect, and all

the rest of it, it would not have been very seemly to change her manner towards you immediately after her husband's death."

So spake Tom, advisedly, watching his quarry all the time most carefully. "As for resenting your instrumentality in finding the will, I am sure you are quite mistaken. She is far too reasonable a woman. I think, on the contrary, she sympathised with the distress you naturally felt at such an unlucky 'find.' I remember thinking so at the time."

"Would to God I had never touched it, or seen it, or had anything to do with it!" exclaimed Ford, with an intense bitterness that startled Tom, and resting his elbow on the desk before him he covered his face with his hands for a moment, as if bowed down with mortification, or grief, or some unpleasant emotion.

"You cannot blame yourself with regard to that," cried Tom, not without sympathy, but with a sudden vivid recollection of Mrs. Travers's doubts—which must be mere surmise—but nevertheless were curious.

"Of course not—of course not!" returned Ford, recovering himself and raising his head. "I merely performed a painful and unavoidable task; but I have allowed myself

to say much more than I intended. My object in asking you here was to beg you would tell me how Mrs. Travers is really placed. The change she has experienced must be very trying ; her means must be painfully limited, and, in spite of all I have suffered through her, I do not like to think of her in poverty. Do be candid with me, Mr. Reed."

"I certainly will, so far as I may," replied Tom. "Mrs. Travers, I am glad to say, has no material wants, and reports herself well, and comparatively content. You know she is a woman singularly indifferent to the outsides of things, but that she ever will be quite at rest until she has upset this will I do not pretend to believe."

"Upset the will!" said Ford, with a look of surprise. "I wish there was a chance of it ! but a greater delusion never existed than to dream of such a thing. What a pity Mrs. Travers allows herself to entertain such an idea !"

"So I tell her ; but she clings to it nevertheless, and will make some move respecting it one of these days."

Ford was silent and in deep thought for fully a minute, his glittering, strained eyes

fixed on vacancy ; then rousing himself, said, with a bitter smile, "Another question or two, Mr. Reed, and I will release you. Sir Hugh Galbraith, when he called here in the spring, was under the impression that Mrs. Travers had contracted a second marriage. Is this the case ?"

"I can answer that definitively and emphatically," said Tom with some heat. "No, certainly not."

"Pray, then, is he right in his surmise that if not actually married, she is engaged, and to yourself ?"

"She is nothing of the kind ! *I* am engaged, but not to Mrs. Travers ; of that I give you my honour !"

"Well, Mr. Reed, I must say I cannot understand why she so resolutely conceals her place of abode from me. I am always, and have been always, her friend."

"I do not pretend to understand her motives. I only endeavour to carry out her wishes," said Tom, rising. "And now I must really bid you good morning. I have already outstayed my time."

"I will not detain you," returned Ford with a bitter smile. "I am obliged to you for this visit, though I cannot say you have afforded me any special information."

"Well, you see, I could not ! Good morning, Mr. Ford."

Very much impressed by the malignant expression of Ford's face, Tom departed, more inclined than he ever was before to lend his ear to what he had hitherto considered Mrs. Travers's preposterous notions on the subject of the will.

The extraordinary vanity and unreasonableness of Ford moved his mirth, and yet he confessed the consistent absurdity of the romance he had weaved for himself, and of which the chief object had been utterly unconscious. The tenacity with which the man clung to his delusion was amazing. His great desire to know how Mrs. Travers was situated, no doubt arose from the hope that poverty and privation might a second time drive her into a marriage of expediency.

"He little knows his woman," thought Tom, as he walked swiftly through St. Paul's Church-yard and on towards Fleet Street. "Nothing would floor her now : she stands alone ; that's enough to strengthen a strong woman. It is the children or parents hanging on them that overweight women for the race of life. Mrs. Travers would float any where. I don't think she likes the bazaar business. I don't think

she would ever have gone into it but for Fanny, dear little saucy Fan ! Please God ! she shall soon have a home of her own. Now to catch that blackguard Trapes !”

This was not so easy to do, but Tom accomplished it. Of course Trapes was furious about the I O U, which he had quite forgotten. He stated his opinion that it was “a d—d dirty trick for one gentleman to play another.” However, Tom pacified him, gave an affecting picture of Poole’s necessities, and promised to compromise the matter. Moreover, he managed in the course of the conversation, without raising Trapes’ suspicions, to draw out sufficient particulars of the transaction to corroborate in every way Poole’s statement respecting its date.

“By-the-way,” said Tom, as his visitor stood up to go, “did Ford turn out to be the man you wanted?”

“What man—what do you mean ?” asked Trapes with a stare.

“Don’t you remember coming to me in the spring to ask who the man was you had seen me talking to——”

“Oh ! ay, to be sure !” cried Trapes ; “thought he was a man that owed me

money ; but he wasn't, my boy !" slapping Tom's shoulder, with a wink and a shout of laughter ; " he wasn't ; still, I haven't done so badly since."

" And you see Ford sometimes ? Have you been dabbling in the stocks, eh ?"

" See Ford ! Never ! Never set eyes on him since I called that time to ascertain—to ascertain—oh ! what was the colour of the winning horse ? He's out of my line altogether," cried Trapes with an insolent air.

" I should think he was," returned Tom ; and then, as his visitor went heavily and noisily down the narrow stair, he added to himself, " But that's an unmitigated lie, nevertheless."

Such were the circumstances which Tom had to detail to the fair partners in the Berlin business when he made his unexpected but welcome appearance that Wednesday, to rouse them from the dull routine of their lives ; and set all Kate's pulses throbbing, with the strangest mixture of exultation, hope, dread, yet resolution.



CHAPTER XIII.

“ **A**ND what is to be done next ?” asked Kate, who was greatly moved, her hands like ice, and visibly trembling, after she and Fanny had listened in nearly unbroken silence and deepest attention to Tom’s communications.

“ Well, I think your best plan is to lay the whole matter before Wall, and be guided by him. This evidence is certainly of the utmost importance, but whether it is sufficient to upset a will is another matter; the opposite party will, of course, try to prove there is a mistake in the date of the I O U. We can easily prove there had been a steeplechase at this place, Reepham, on that particular date ; but then

again, Trapes is a very disreputable witness, and it will be difficult at this distance of time to show that Poole had been absent from the office on that special day. Still, I am now convinced there is truth in your conviction of foul play ; and I shall hunt up evidence with a will."

" Ah, Tom, you never believed me before."

" He is naturally an unbelieving Jew !" cried Fanny.

" At last, at last," murmured Mrs. Temple, not heeding her, " there is a pin's point of light. But adieu to peace for many a day ; it is war to the knife now ! But should I be defeated, how shall I bear it, Tom ?"

" Don't think of that. We must make our position sure before we take any step ; we must mask our batteries carefully till the last moment."

Mrs. Temple was sitting with her elbows on the table, and her face hidden in her hands.

" And Hugh Galbraith," she said, " have you heard anything of him ?"

" There was a report a couple of months ago that he was going to be married to Lord C——'s eldest daughter ; but I have heard no more of it."

"And if he marries, how terrible it will be for him! But then for the sake of others he must accept a compromise; he must accept a share of the property, even to——"

"Why, Mrs. Temple, you surely do not intend to show the white feather now?" cried Tom, much surprised at her tone.

"Rest assured I shall not. Nothing shall turn me from the task of vindicating myself and my husband's memory from the disgrace of that infamous will. But it is hard to be cruel to others!"

Her voice trembled; she stopped abruptly, and suddenly left the room. Tom looked inquiringly at Fanny.

"She has never been quite the same since Sir Hugh was here. I think she is sorry for him. I am sure it would be much better if she had just said who she was, and they settled it without fighting, or lawyers," said Fanny.

"Perhaps so," returned Tom. "But then Mrs. Travers naturally wants the matter cleared up publicly."

"After all, what is the public to her? they know nothing about her, and care less."

"Very true; but you must remember that she had been in possession of the property,

and it was publicly taken from her. I think she is right in insisting on its being publicly restored."

Fanny was silent for a few moments in a pretty thoughtful attitude, with her hands clasped upon her knee; and after looking at her admiringly and expectantly, Tom proceeded to unclasp them, and take possession of one. He had just opened his lips to speak of his own affairs when Fanny said softly and solemnly, "Tom!"

"Well, what is it, my darling?"

"Tom, you won't say anything to any one, will you?"

"Not if I was put on the rack, or torn to pieces by wild horses."

"You need not laugh; I am quite in earnest."

"So am I. Go on. There is something tremendous coming."

"Do you know"—still in a carefully lowered tone—"I think Sir Hugh Galbraith is quite in love with Kate."

"Oh, indeed! Well, that's possible, though I have always heard him spoken of as a cold, stiff sort of fellow, not at all a subject for the tender passion. But the wisest have their weak moments; witness myself."

“ Well, but, Tom,” reiterated Fanny, too absorbed in her subject to administer a deserved rebuke, “ I really believe he is.”

“ What are the symptoms? I daresay he was struck with her. But love is a thing of many degrees; come, your reasons?”

“ I can hardly describe the symptoms. I know he used to look rather disgusted or perhaps disappointed whenever I went up to write his letters instead of Kate.”

“ Oh, you used to write his letters? Had he a large correspondence?”

“ Yes, he was always wanting two or three lines written to somebody or other, about horses, and different people in his regiment; and then whenever he came down of an evening——”

“ Then he used to spend the evening with you sometimes?”

“ Oh, yes—that is—I don’t think I ought to tell you, Tom, though Kate never told me I must not. Don’t say a word about it, like a dear.”

“ Provided my silence is properly paid for, I have no objection to preserve it unbroken.”

“ Do be serious. When he used to knock at the door, and ask to come in, and Kate would allow him, his long solemn face used to

brighten up in the most wonderful way. He was absolutely good-looking for a few minutes; and he always listened to every word she said as if he was drinking in her voice, though she contradicted him perpetually — they never seemed able to agree. Then he had a way of resting his elbow on the table, and shading his eyes with his hand,—but *I* could see it was just to stare at Kate without being noticed. Why, the very tone of his voice was quite different when he spoke to her."

"Upon my soul, this *is* a revelation. I always thought Mrs. Travers rather reserved about her lodger; but she is not the sort of woman the most audacious scoundrel would venture to——"

"Sir Hugh was nothing of the kind," interrupted Fanny, with some warmth. "He was as quiet and mild as if he was an archbishop. I really could not help liking him. And he gave me such a lovely bracelet. But I suppose if he knew who we are, he would be ready to trample us under his feet—so Kate says."

"This is altogether a curious revelation," reiterated Tom. "I had no idea you had been on such intimate terms. I don't think Mrs. Travers showed her usual discretion."

"Nonsense!" cried Fanny, sharply. "She always knows what she is about."

"Perhaps so. But, Fan, did she reciprocate at all?"

"No, not a bit. She does not think much of him in any way, only she can't dislike him when he seems to admire her; one always has a sort of kindness for any man who admires one!"

"That's a pleasant look-out for me," said Tom.

"It *is* well for you," returned Fanny, with saucy emphasis. "But do not say a word to Kate about what I have told you."

"Trust me," said Tom, more seriously. "I fancy Galbraith's admiration (if you are right) must have been a great annoyance to her, if not an additional source of dislike and bitterness, in spite of your theories, my philosopher. But why the deuce didn't she bundle him out when he began to moon and spoon? I am sure she is plucky enough."

"I don't think she saw as much as I did; I am *sure* she did not. She used to talk away as calmly and as unconcerned as if he was her grandfather; and he did not 'spoon,' as you call it. (I am sure I hope you do not put such vulgar words in your 'leaders.') He was quite natural and often disagreeable."

"Then, my dear girl, he wasn't in love, and you have wasted some precious moments over an imaginary difficulty. I can't picture a man making himself disagreeable to the woman he is in love with."

"That is all you know! I begin to think myself a much better informed person than you are. I can tell you that men can make themselves horribly disagreeable to girls they perfectly adore!"

"Your experience alarms me," said Tom gravely. "I grant that, given a jolly row, each party can annoy the other pretty considerably; but at the stage Galbraith had reached, it ought to have been all fair weather; at any rate, I always feel, always *have* felt, desperately amiable and sunshiny in the adored one's presence! Eh, Fanny?"

"My dear Tom, you have been occasionally odious, I am happy to say; otherwise I should have believed you to be a rank impostor, and expected you to beat me when we were married," cried Fanny, laughing, yet blushing brightly too, when she found how her sentence ended; then the conversation became purely personal, and will not bear repeating.

Kate left them together to enjoy a long

confidential talk, and when she joined them at the cosy supper she had assisted Mills to prepare, she was quite herself. In the interim she had made up her mind. She would press upon Mr. Wall the necessity of speedy action, so as to give Hugh Galbraith the earliest possible notice of the trial before him. Never inclined to doubt her own success, or look at the reverse of a pleasant picture, this new gleam of hope acquired the most positive colour from the medium through which she viewed it, and her great desire was to give a character of fair and open warfare to the coming battle. Galbraith would then be prepared, and when the truth came out fully, she would, through her lawyer, in a quiet and business-like way, insist on settling the bulk of the fortune upon him, asking only in return an acknowledgment that, after all, his cousin had not made so unworthy a choice. "Then he need never know that I had appeared to him in an assumed character. He will be humiliated enough without *that!* poor fellow, and I do not want him to think of me—*me*, my own self, as different from what he now believes. Years hence, when perhaps he is married, and the outlines of the present have faded from their painful sharpness, we might

meet and be friends. But he is the last man in the world to care a straw for any woman he is not in love with or married to ! He is far too English to have female friends !”

“ And suppose, Tom,” said Kate, as they discussed “ possibilities ” after the evening meal, “ suppose we get more evidence, or whatever is necessary, to induce Mr. Wall to take up the case, what is to be done ? How will he proceed ?”

“ Why, at the very outset, we have immense difficulties. You see, it seems that either Poole’s signature is forged, or the date of the will has been altered, or that Poole knowingly signed a false document as witness. Now I don’t believe he did this ; his manner is perfectly innocent and unembarrassed. My own impression is that the whole thing is fabricated, signatures and all. Wonderfully well done ! Our first task will be to discover who did it. Once we make that out, we must lay information before a magistrate !”

“ Against Hugh Galbraith ?” interrupted Mrs. Temple quickly.

“ No,” returned Tom with a smile, and a glance at Fanny—“ against whoever we find

has forged the will ; and then the magistrate will, on the evidence, commit the miscreant to take his trial at the sessions. Upon the commitment Galbraith must be communicated with, and required to give up the property. Then will come ‘the tug of war.’”

“ It will, indeed ! ” returned Mrs. Temple, thoughtfully. “ And of course, coming before a magistrate, the affair will be sufficiently public.”

“ Public ! I should think so ! and coming on, as I suppose it will, before Parliament meets, a romantic case like that will be a god-send to the papers. I will give you stunning articles in the *M. T.*”

“ I hope you will do no such thing, Tom.”

“ I must look at that book of Chabot’s on the writing of Junius,” continued Tom, not heeding her.

“ Who is Chabot ? ” asked Fanny.

“ Oh, the expert—a man learned in handwriting, who is supposed to detect forgeries and interpolations.”

“ A sort of detective, I suppose ! I hope, Tom, the opposite party will not be sending any detective after us ! ”

“ Nonsense, Fan ! that would be no use,” returned Mrs. Temple.

"The great difficulty will be," said Tom, addressing her, "who to fix the forgery on, if Poole is, as I suppose, innocent. I am reluctant to take him into our confidence, for he seems not overburdened with sense. In short, I am almost sorry I jumped so impulsively to the decision of coming down here now I see what an effect my intelligence has had. I am greatly inclined to share your convictions respecting the will, but how to prove them—I wish," interrupting himself, "you would give me some of Mr. Travers's writings—his signature if possible—I suppose you have plenty?"

"Yes, you shall have it."

"And I will get C—— to look at the will, and compare the two signatures."

There was a pause, and then Mrs. Temple said slowly and reluctantly, "I have also some of Ford's writing, Tom; do not fail to examine that."

Tom looked at her earnestly.

"You do not mean to say your suspicions are so strong?"

"I do! It goes terribly against me to harm him in any way, but he or I must suffer, and I will not be under a wrong. I must attack Mr. Ford, Tom! I must!"

After much discussion it was decided that Reed should examine the will ; and if he thought it prudent, take Poole to look at the signatures ; in short, do his utmost to collect evidence by the time Mr. Wall returned from his usual autumn excursion ; and Kate declared her intention of going up to town to be present when the subject was broached to the wary old lawyer. "I think, Tom, he feels for me, and I might have more influence by speaking instead of writing."

"No doubt," replied Tom ; "he will not return for another month, and then your busiest season will be over ; I will let you know when he arrives. But I say, Mrs. Travers, it is rather unlucky that Gregory is away at sea ! He would surely know his father's handwriting. Well, at any rate, I will lose no time in getting C—— to look at the will ; but, first, I will write to Poole, and procure his signature in reply, so that I may have some data on which to ask C——'s opinion. Give me the specimens of Mr. Travers's and Ford's writing you promised, and I will go. I must catch the earliest train to-morrow, for nothing *ought* to have drawn me away from the desk to-day ! But how can a poor devil resist when love and friendship pull together ?"

The weeks which succeeded this hurried and disturbing visit were exceedingly trying to Kate. The monotony of her occupation, the iteration of days behind the counter, were almost intolerable when her nerves were on the rack, and expectation strained to the utmost ; yet she struggled bravely to resist the tendency to be irritable and depressed, or to sit down and think, and create visions of triumph or ghosts of defeat from the mists of the future. One view of the subject helped to keep heart and nerves in a perpetual state of painful vibration. Whether the future contained victory or defeat, both would be bitter to her. To be compelled to crush Ford, a man she had known well and long, and for whom she had the degree of sympathy which arises from comprehension, this was the worst consequence of success ; but second only to this cruel necessity was the result to Hugh Galbraith. After tasting the sweets of fortune equal to his social position, to be hurled back into that “ slough of despond,” genteel poverty ! He, so proud and sensitive as she knew he was, under the cold, plain, immovable exterior he presented to common observers, and by her, to whom he had frankly offered himself and all he possessed ! “ Though,”

thought the young widow, with a smile at the recollection, "that was a momentary impulse, a freak from the consequences of which he is, no doubt, by this time thankful to have escaped. He is by no means a bad fellow—yet not at all the sort of man I would fall in love with, even had we met under different circumstances. He is so prejudiced and uncultivated, and innately tyrannical." Nevertheless, she felt it would be a terrible grief to wound him, still, to fail would be intolerable, irreparable—to be conquered by Galbraith was the one thing worse than conquering him. To be condemned for ever to her present life, with its narrow influences and deadening sameness—this would be unendurable. "Yet," thought Kate, "had I adopted this life without any consciousness of having been defrauded of my rights, I could have borne it better, but not in such a corner as Pierstoffe. Alas! I fear the day is far off when common sense will have sufficient force to prevent the social disfranchisement which an employment such as mine entails. Even when it comes, will it not be moving the barrier a few steps lower down, rather than destroying the barrier? Inequalities will always exist, but they may be softened and lessened till perhaps, as Fanny

says, a few hundred years hence Liberals and Revolutionists may be reduced to advocate the rights of those ill-used and degraded creatures the gorillas and ourangs!"

But, as it has been said, Kate struggled resolutely with her own weakness ; she busied herself in every possible occupation ; she took long rambles with and without Fanny after the closing hour ; and though sometimes silent and sometimes uttering, half jest half earnest, more biting remarks on her customers and the world in general than she usually indulged in, she never permitted her suppressed irritation to touch the helpless creatures dependent on her. She was as gentle to Mills, as kindly to Fanny, as in their most tranquil days.

How beautiful and grand is the tenderness of a strong, loving heart that, instead of despising and overlooking natures slighter and poorer than its own, seeks to uphold and enrich them with the forbearing generosity we give to children, and like the sunshine of a glowing summer's day, lends or develops beauty even in the common things which come within the influence of its radiance and its warmth !



CHAPTER XIV.

“  HAT is Tom about, I wonder?” cried Fanny one evening, nearly a month after his visit; “ we have not heard from him for more than ten days.”

“ We must have patience,” said Kate, with a little sigh. “ I am sure he is doing his best; but delays will occur. He said that man, the expert he wanted to show the writing to, was very much engaged just now.”

“ Think of that!” returned Fanny, indignantly. “ Who could imagine that, in a country like this, there would be such heaps of forgeries as to keep a man busy finding them out.”

Mrs. Temple did not reply. She was making up her books, for it was Saturday ; and she preferred "stealing a few hours from the night" to passing them sleeplessly in bed. Fanny, "dull sleep and a drowsy bed scorning," insisted on keeping her company, but found it hard work to be wakeful and silent while her friend added up long lines of figures and compared results.

At last Kate put down her pen. "I feel unusually stupid, Fan. I do heartily wish we had some news—something to do ; I feel, oh, so weary of waiting !" She leaned her head on her hand as she spoke.

"Poor dear ! I am sure I don't wonder," said Fanny, sympathetically. "I saw you were nearly worn out when you spoke so sharply to Lady Styles to-day ; but she was enough to drive any one frantic. What did she say about Sir Hugh ?"

"Oh, that he had started a yacht, a superb yacht, and was launching into all sorts of extravagances ; and that Colonel Upton had deserted her to spend the whole of his time or leave of absence with Hugh, and that such folly would come to no good end ; but I believe very little of all this. Listen to me, Fan. If Tom fails in procuring sufficient proof—

that is, if I found it imprudent to proceed—what shall we do?"

"I am sure I do not know. What do you mean?"

"Oh, Fanny, I hardly know myself, but I cannot stay here. You, I suppose, will marry soon, so I have only poor Mills to think of. Were it not that I do not like to desert her—the last bit of home left to me—I would sell the shop and go out as a governess to Russia, or Tartary, or anywhere!"

"My dearest Kate, what puts that into your head?"

"Because I feel so thoroughly unsettled. If this gleam of hope proves illusory, I shall never be able to settle here—never! And yet we are not doing so badly, Fanny." She pointed to the large book which lay open before her as she spoke.

Fanny rose and looked over her shoulder for a moment, then, glancing at some other smaller volumes of figures which were also open for consultation upon the table, heaved a deep sigh. "You are a wonderful woman, Kate! How you can find your way through all these awful books, and know whether you win or lose, puzzles me. I can sell tolerably, but as for arithmetic! You could manage an

office, I do believe. It is a pity you are not a man!"

"It is indeed," echoed her friend, resting her cheek upon her hand, and gazing absently away to the open window, through which the garden could be seen sleeping in the autumn moonlight. "As I am, I have none of the privileges of either man or woman. I have none of the help and care which fall to the lot of most women, and yet I cannot use what gifts I possess to push my fortune as I should like because I am not a man. But I must do the best I can. Look, Fanny," drawing over the purchase-book, and pointing to a column of entries, "we have all this stock, and it is paid for! there is quite thirty-six pounds due to us, and there is a balance of forty-nine pounds eleven shillings and sixpence in the bank. To be sure we must now begin to pay our house expenses from our earnings, but then we want very few more goods till spring, except for Christmas novelties. I believe we might do very well here if I could stay, but I cannot—I feel I cannot. There are elements in the life which I did not calculate on, or underrated. The existence is purely material; I would much prefer being a chemist or a bookseller."

Fanny listened in some dismay. "Yes, dear, I daresay it is very disagreeable ; but just think of the smell of a chemist's shop, and all the horrid things that would stain your hands. Now this shop is clean, and nice, and pretty ; I would think twice before I gave it up."

"Of course I shall," said Mrs. Temple, rising and closing her books. "Moreover, Fan, I shall do nothing till you are married."

"Well, that is uncertain. Tom said very little about it when he was down here," said Fan, with a slight pout.

"You unreasonable little puss," cried Mrs. Temple, laughing. "Did you not say you would hear nothing on that head till my affairs were settled ? Well, I feel as if something would happen soon. Yet this waiting seems long—very long." She locked away her books in their proper drawer, and, walking to the window, stood looking out for a minute in silence ; while Fanny somewhat stealthily put out her writing-materials to indite a scolding to Tom.

"Give me the *Times*, Fanny," said Mrs. Temple, rousing herself ; "I have not looked at it to-day."

She drew a chair near the table and lamp,

and read on for some time without speaking, turning over the sheets somewhat listlessly. At length she asked, in a low and somewhat unsteady tone, "Do you remember what was the name of the vessel Captain Gregory commanded?"

"The vessel Captain Gregory commanded?" repeated Fanny, looking a little puzzled.

"Yes. You remember he sailed last April, and I am sure Tom mentioned the name of the ship—try and think."

"Oh, I recollect his going away; yes, I do remember something—oh dear, what was the name? can't you remember it?"

"I imagine I do; but I want to hear what you can recall."

"It was," exclaimed Fanny, biting the top of her pen—"it was the *Fairy*, or *Fairy* something."

"Listen to this, then." And Mrs. Temple read from the paper: "'On the 4th instant the brig *Mary Jane*, of Leith, John Collins, master, homeward bound from Bordeaux, picked up, a few miles off the Lizard, two men and a boy, who were clinging to an overturned boat. They had been upwards of twenty-four hours in the water, and were greatly exhausted. It appears they

are the captain, a seaman, and the cabin-boy of the ship *Fairy Rock*, which was run down by a large steamer on the night of the 3rd, as she was on her return voyage from Pernambuco. The steamer kept on her course without the slightest attempt to succour the ill-fated ship, which was almost cut in two; and while the crew were attempting to take to the boats she sank. The captain received a blow on the head as the vessel went down from one of the spars, and was partially insensible for a few moments. When he came to himself he was in the water near a boat floating bottom up; upon this he clambered, and afterwards assisted the boy to the same position, where they were joined by the sailor. They had nearly lost heart when they were rescued. The captain proceeded yesterday to make a deposition before the Lord Mayor, but fainted before the conclusion of his narrative."

"Now can this be Captain Gregory?" said Kate, laying down the paper and turning very pale.

"Oh, I am sure it is—it can be nobody else!" cried Fanny, snatching it up. "Poor man, how unlucky he is! Now he will be laid up ever so long, and not be able to look at the writing or anything. What wretches

they must be on board that steamer ! If poor Captain Gregory had not been run down he would have been safe and well in London by this !”

But Mrs. Temple hardly listened. “I must write to Tom,” she said nervously; “you are writing to him, are you not ? Well, let us cut out this piece of news and enclose it, and I will add a line imploring a speedy reply.”

A sleepless night was the inevitable consequence of this intelligence. In vain Kate told herself that Gregory’s evidence could not really be of much importance—still, in her strained condition of nerves, every additional source of disquiet, however slight, became magnified.

However, the next day’s afternoon post brought Tom’s long-expected letter, which contained things good and bad.

He had taken C—— to compare the signatures of the will with the writing supplied by Mrs. Temple, and his sentence was that he considered Poole’s genuine, Mr. Travers’s doubtful, and thought there was a possible trace of Ford’s hand in Gregory’s.

Tom had also examined a file of *Bell’s Life*, and found a report of the Reepham Steeple-

chase on the same date as Trapes' I O U. It was very desirable, Tom added, to obtain some corroborative testimony as to Poole's presence at these races on the day in question, which Tom did not despair of finding; finally, he informed Kate that Mr. Wall was expected back next week, and he strongly advised her to come up to town on the following Monday or Tuesday, to be on the spot when he arrived, so as to lose no time in laying her hopes and difficulties before the experienced lawyer. Moreover, he (Tom Reed) would secure her a quiet lodging in the Maida Hill district, which would be preferable to, and less costly than a hotel. Then came a hasty postscript,—

“Had just finished the above when I saw the narrow escape of poor Gregory in the *Evening Mail*. I hurried off to his owners, got his address, and have just seen the poor fellow; he is terribly cut up, and looks as gaunt as can be expected. It will be a considerable time before he will be capable of attending to anything, so I did not touch on your affairs. He goes down to-morrow to his native place, where his family have been for some time; I have the address. Give the enclosed to Fan, and keep up your heart; we will frustrate their knavish tricks yet.”

"Thank heaven!" cried Mrs. Temple, with renewed animation in her eyes. "There is some movement at last; I have been thirsting to be on the scene of action. I shall see this expert myself, though I suppose his visits are costly—one must risk something. This is Thursday; on Tuesday I shall go up to town. Fanny, dear little Fan, you will be able to manage pretty well without me?"

"Oh yes, don't trouble about me; I shall be as wise as a serpent, and as harmless as a dove. Mills and I will keep shop and house, neck-and-neck, as Mr. Turner would say; and I am equal to Lady Styles now, though I shall have a severe cross-examination respecting your movements."

"Never mind," returned Kate, smiling; "remember you have but one *theme*, whatever may be the variations. I have gone to town on business, and will be back in a day or two—a 'day or two' is delightfully vague; once away I am, you are not answerable for anything."

"Quite true," said Fanny.

Although there were sundry arrangements to be made in order to simplify Fanny's work as much as possible during her absence, the

time seemed very long to Kate till the Tuesday came round ; and then an unexpected tenderness and regret for the humble home she had wearied of, surprised her. She felt she was going forth to war, that she was making the first step in her onward march to painful victory or unendurable defeat.

The journey to town was as depressing as damp, chill, drizzling weather could make it ; and it was with a sudden sense of comfort and support that Kate recognised Tom Reed's sharp, pleasant face through the early gloom of an October evening. It was not only delightful to have a hand to help her out of the carriage and to extricate her luggage, small as it was ; but, knowing his engagements as she did, it was a proof of thoughtful kindness that he should have stolen half an hour from the busy afternoon to meet her.

" My dear Tom ! How good of you to meet me. I have had a miserable journey—two fat farmers for my companions half the way, and a severe female, who gave me a tract, the rest."

" Such creatures should be arrested by the police !" returned Tom sympathizingly. " But come along. Have you only one portman-

teau? Sensible woman! We will have a hansom."

And they bowled along speedily to the lodging Tom had selected, in one of the small demi-semi genteel streets which properly belong to Paddington, but prefer the more refined definition of Maida Hill.

"I put you here," said Tom, as a stout, elderly woman, with a broad, good-humoured face, substantial merino "afternoon" dress, an elaborate cap, and stiffly-curled front, secured by three rows of narrow black velvet, ushered them into her front parlour, of tolerable dimensions, with a window opening upon a damp garden, where a few mangy shrubs suggested forcibly the idea of living death, while the tables, chairs, and sofas were shrouded in ample coverings of crochet and netting, which caught on the buttons and hooks of the unwary, carrying away plaster Shakespeares and misshapen delf bandits in their treacherous sweep. "I have put you here," repeated Tom, noticing the desponding glance with which Kate surveyed the apartment, "because," with a complimentary wave of the hand to the landlady, who stood at the door holding Kate's travelling bag, "I know Mrs. Small to be a person of high respect-

ability ; and, as you are by yourself, it will be a sort of protection to you to be in her house. Her son is one of the best men in our office."

Smiles and a curtsey from Mrs. Small.
"Would the lady like tea, sir?"

"Thank you," returned Kate, "I should very much."

"I'll send it up directly, ma'am. You would like to see your room ? It is just at the back, here. I wish there was a door through, it would be more private-like ; and the landlord promised," &c., &c., &c.

"I am sorry to say I have only a few minutes to stay," began Tom.

"Then send up tea, I will see my room afterwards," said Kate. "Thank you very much, dear Tom, for all your thought and kindness," she continued, as Mrs. Small left the room. "I am so glad you know something of this person. Now, have you any more news ?"

"No, nothing, except that Wall was expected to-day ; and Wreford—the partner, you know—said I might be sure he would be at the office to-morrow. Suppose you meet me there at twelve-thirty ? I would come for you, but I am so desperately busy, as I will

explain to you, that I can scarcely find time to eat. You do not mind going alone?"

"Not in the very least! I put aside all ladylike incapability when I went into trade, and I should be so glad to set things going, and return again as fast as I can. I never dreaded anything so much as this visit to London and my interview with Mr. Wall!"

"That is not like your usual pluck, Mrs. Travers. By-the-by, in engaging these rooms, I hesitated which name I should give you, and decided on Temple, principally to dodge Ford, if by any chance he were to get on the scent! He might worry you, and I do not think you are up to more than is unavoidable."

"Thank you very much for this," said Mrs. Temple (as we must still call her). "I am most anxious not to be known by my right name till I *have* my rights."

"Strange as it seems—unaccountable as it is," returned Tom, thoughtfully, "I begin to think—to fear—that your suspicions of Ford are well founded! Yet it is almost incredible that a quiet, respectable 'citizen of famous London town' should commit such a felony, merely to spite you, without the slightest gain to himself!"

“I think he intended to get me into his power as well as to spite me, Tom. If we prove this against him, what will be the end of it?”

“Penal servitude,” said Tom, shortly.

“I can hardly bring myself to inflict that—yet I must go on.”

“Of course,” he rejoined; “but I must leave you, I am sorry to say. I would much rather spend the evening here. I have lots to say about my own affairs, but I must not stay. Here is a very good novel! sit down and lose yourself in it. A good novel is a benefaction; and as for the Philistines who prate about fiction, there is often more truth in a good novel than in a biography, which is generally carefully cooked to spare the feelings of friends and relatives even to the third and fourth generation, till a most distorted image, a complete fancy sketch, is offered to the public. There, ‘Madame,’ weep over the trials of the heroine if you will, but don’t give a thought to your own.”

Kate followed his advice. Cheered by the consciousness of his steady friendship and support, she contrived to keep the demon of depression at bay; and, somewhat fatigued

after her journey, was fortunate in obtaining a good night's rest.

The next day was still cheerless and drizzling. However, wrapped in her waterproof, her face shrouded by a thick veil, Kate managed to reach the well-known office through the greasy streets by many a devious turning, without any misadventure. In her present mood it was a relief to walk rather than sit silent, pent up among strangers in an omnibus.

She thought she was too early; but Tom met her at the corner of the street in which Mr. Wall's office was situated.

"You are in capital time, but we will go on at once." And they walked rather silently to the door.

"Mr. Wall has not returned, sir," was the reply to Tom's inquiries,—"does not return till Friday."

With a bitter sense of disappointment Kate turned away.

"That means I cannot see him till Monday," she said as they went slowly down the street.

"True. Yet you must stay on in town. Write a line making an appointment for Monday, and then you may be able to leave

the following day, which will just finish the week for which I engaged your rooms."

"I will, Tom ; but what a wretched time I shall have of it ! You really must come and see me whenever you can."

"Unfortunately," began Tom, but stopped himself. "Come, my dear Mrs. Travers," he resumed ; "I breakfasted early, let us go down to Verey's and have a little luncheon. I am ravenous ; and I daresay your breakfast was a nominal one." So saying, he hailed a cab, and, before Kate could well reply, handed her in.

"Take another glass ; that St. Julian is not bad," cried Reed, as the waiter put some Roquefort cheese and celery upon the table after their dinner rather than luncheon. "For I have a tale to unfold which you will not like. Yesterday morning I had a telegram from Pau, announcing poor Pennington's death, and requesting me to go over at once, which I must do, both for the widow's sake and for other reasons ; however, I postponed my journey till to-night, for I could not bear you to find me gone. As I saw you were rather in the dolefuls I would not tell you till we had seen Wall. Now there is no help

for it. I must start by the mail this evening, and you must face the interview, and, what is worse, the business, as best you can ; and you will do it well, or I am much mistaken. Yours is a spirit of the right sort, and will always answer the spur."

"But, oh ! Tom ; you are a terrible loss. How I wish I had not come up to town !"

"We could not possibly foresee such a combination of disappointments. Still you must remember there is nothing in them to damp your hopes."

"When shall you be back ?"

"Possibly in a week, and when I do return it will be as editor ; then Fanny *must* make up her mind. I sent her a few lines this morning. I am really and truly sorry for poor Pen ; but it is a stroke of fortune for me. Now I must say my say, and leave you. Do not be cast down by the way Wall will probably receive your news. We must get more evidence. I know that ! but his advice and guidance will be a great help towards finding it. That fellow Trapes has disappeared again. I cannot help fancying that he has something to do with the mystery. His knowledge of Ford seems so strange. When I return I will unearth him wherever

he is. So keep up your heart, my dear Mrs. Travers. All will go well yet."

Kate did feel disproportionately cast down, though she knew as well as her adviser that in the contretemps of his departure, and Mr. Wall's prolonged absence, there was no real check to her hopes ; but the hopes were so commingled with fears, that at best they were oppressive ; now to face a week's lonely self-communing absolutely appalled her. But she was not going to torment Tom, her true, devoted friend, or punish him with a dose of discomfort for what he could not help ; for besides the native generosity which in her was nearly as strong an instinct as that of self-preservation, she had the knowledge of men's common weaknesses which four or five years of matrimony may well impart to duller women than Kate Travers, and knew that the one unpardonable sin in the eyes of creation's lord is to make him uncomfortable, mentally or physically.

" Of course you are a terrible loss," she said, checking her inclination to cry, and even managing a tremulous sort of smile. " But I shall just possess my soul in patience, and beard Mr. Wall boldly ; and you will write a line to me, Tom ?"

"Certainly — undoubtedly," replied Tom.
"Moreover, I have given directions that a parcel of books and mags. shall be sent to you. So now I must run away. Shall I put you into a cab?"

"No, thank you. I think I shall try to walk back ; it will occupy the time, and give me a better chance of sleeping. By the way, Tom, why should I not go and see poor Captain Gregory, as you say he is at no great distance?"

"Ay, do ! Here — here's his address," hastily opening his pocket-book, and producing a piece of paper. "Lillington ; it's on the Great Northern line, and I think you have to change at H——. I fancy a return fare will be six or seven shillings. Here's C——'s address, too, in case Wall wants him. And now good-bye, God bless you ; don't be downhearted." And they turned on their various ways at the door.

Kate walked steadily back to her lodgings, thus occupying a full hour ; and then, when she had removed her damp out-door attire, it was sufficiently dusk to shut out the melancholy garden, and light the gas. A long, long letter to Fanny, and the novel, helped her over the evening, so she retired to rest more

cheerfully than she had hoped to do. Having consulted Bradshaw as to the trains for Lillington, she requested the landlady to give her a very early breakfast, if the morning was tolerably fine, determining to devote the day to her intended visit.

END OF VOL. II.

